CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE
HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

PLATO
The Republic

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

Series editors

RAYMOND GEUSS
Professor of Philosophy, University of Cambridge

QUENTIN SKINNER
Professor of the Humanities, Queen Mary, University of London

Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought is now firmly established as the major student textbook series in political theory. It aims to make available to students all the most important texts in the history of western political thought, from ancient Greece to the early twentieth century. All the familiar classic texts will be included, but the series seeks at the same time to enlarge the conventional canon by incorporating an extensive range of less well-known works, many of them never before available in a modern English edition. Wherever possible, texts are published in complete and unabridged form, and translations are specially commissioned for the series. Each volume contains a critical introduction together with chronologies, biographical sketches, a guide to further reading and any necessary glossaries and textual apparatus. When completed, the series will aim to offer an outline of the entire evolution of western political thought.

For a list of titles published in the series, please see end of book.

PLATO

The Republic

EDITED BY

G. R. F. FERRARI
University of California, Berkeley

TRANSLATED BY

TOM GRIFFITH

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.
It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title:www.cambridge.org/9780521484435

First published 2000
19th printing 2015

Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books Inc.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Plato.
[Republic. English]
The republic / Plato ; edited by G. R. F. Ferrari ; translated by Tom Griffith.
p. cm. – (Cambridge texts in the history of political thought)
Includes index.
ISBN 0-521-48443-X (pbk) – ISBN 0-521-48173-2 (hardback)
1. Political science–Early works to 1800. 2. Utopias–Early works to 1800. I. Ferrari, G. R. F. (Giovanni R. F.) II. Griffith, Tom. III. Title. IV. Series
JC71.P35 2000
321′.07–dc21 00-024471

ISBN 978-0-521-48173-1 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-48443-5 Paperback

Contents

Translator's preface

If you tell people you are translating Plato's *Republic*, the question they almost invariably ask is 'Why? Surely there are plenty of translations already.' The answer is fairly simple. For whatever reason, Plato chose to put his philosophical thoughts in dialogue form, and I believe that when he did so, he intended these dialogues to sound like conversations. Maybe not straightforward, everyday conversations, but conversations nonetheless. And it is still true, though things have improved in recent years, that there are many translations of Plato where you cannot read a complete page without coming across something which no English-speaking person would ever say, or ever have said. So in balancing the conflicting demands of the translator, I have tried to give the highest priority, with only a few exceptions, to the requirement that what I wrote should sound like a conversation. The danger in this, since I am not a professional Plato scholar, was that in trying to make it sound conversational I might commit myself to an interpretation which ran counter to the agreed and accepted views of those who were scholars. That being so, I have been exceptionally fortunate to have had John Ferrari as my academic minder. I would never have undertaken the project without his encouragement and guarantee of help and support. And once embarked on it, I found him ready and willing to give up huge amounts of his time to the task of vetting my early drafts – a laborious task which involved reading the whole text against the Greek, flagging the hundreds (literally) of passages where he did not agree with what I had written, explaining in precise detail why he disagreed, and (bless him) suggesting an alternative in each and every instance. His influence is strongest in those passages where the translation of key terms has been the subject of much critical discussion, but

there is no part of the translation which has not benefited immeasurably from his comments, advice and suggestions, and it should be seen, to a very considerable extent, as a joint effort rather than mine alone. It has been an enormous labour for him, and I am greatly in his debt for performing it.

TOM GRIFFITH

Editor's preface

The thought of translating Plato's *Republic* is not unlikely to cross the mind of any Platonist. Whenever it crossed mine, I dismissed it firmly. Too many scholarly ghosts hovered about its text, too many pitfalls lurked on every page, and the impossibility of satisfying all of the readers all of the time was only too easy to anticipate. Then I discovered Tom Griffith's remarkable translation of Plato's *Symposium,* and saw that there could after all be a role for me in producing a new translation of the *Republic*, a technical, advisory role, and that the effort would be repaid many times over. I have had the privilege of exceptionally close editorial collaboration with Tom as his translation took shape, and he co-operated with unfailing intelligence, patience and tact. For all my relentless editing of details, the translation remains essentially his. I have contributed the introduction, notes, and other ancillary material – all of which have benefited from Tom's scrutiny.

JOHN FERRARI

Introduction

Plato's Republic *is the first great work of Western political philosophy, and has retained its grip on the imagination of political thinkers for over two thousand years. It was also very much the product of particular historical circumstances. In this introduction we will consider the political instability of the Greek world in the late fifth and early fourth centuries* BC *and investigate the cultural factors most likely to have influenced Plato when he came to write the* Republic, *bearing in mind that he was not only a pre-eminent philosopher but also a literary writer, an educator, and, not least, an Athenian aristocrat (pp. xi–xxii). We will then assess the* Republic*'s position within political philosophy (pp. xxii–xxv), and present the essentials of its argument (pp. xxv–xxxi). We begin with a harrowing episode from Athenian history – an episode in which Plato's family played a major role.*

The Thirty

Plato's mother's cousin was a tyrant. In the course of a single convulsive year, from summer to summer, 404–403 BC, Critias son of Callaeschrus made himself leader of a thirty-man junta imposed on Athens by a foreign power, disarmed the populace, ordered the murder of hundreds of prominent persons – some for their money, some to settle old scores, others because they were rivals – and died fighting the band of exiles that soon after restored the city to democracy. The discussion narrated in Plato's *Republic* takes place in the home of a family that was to come to grief at the hands of the Thirty. Polemarchus, according to the tale his brother Lysias survived to tell, was one of those murdered for their money. Lysias

himself went on to fund the democratic resistance and supply it from the family's arms business. The resistance was based in the Piraeus, the port-district of Athens, a magnet not only for successful immigrant families such as that of Lysias and Polemarchus, whose home was there, but also for the lower ranks of society, who manned and serviced the Athenian navy. The label 'men of the Piraeus' came to identify those who fought for the democracy. The decisive battle – the conflict in which Critias lost his life – took place by the temple of Bendis, the goddess whose inaugural festival gave Socrates, the leader of the discussion at Polemarchus' house, a reason to come to the Piraeus in the first place. Another who lost his life there was Charmides, an associate of the Thirty with special responsibility for the Piraeus. He was Plato's uncle. Not Plato's only, but uncle too of Glaucon and Adeimantus, for Plato gives a major role in the discussion to his own two brothers, and puts them on the best of terms with a family whom their kinsmen will ruin. Socrates was for his part to incur the hostility of the returning democrats because he counted the likes of Critias and Charmides among his philosophic companions.

It is difficult to know what to make of Plato's *mise-en-scène*, and tempting to turn to an autobiographical passage of his *Seventh Letter* (324c–326b), which purports to describe his own dealings with the Thirty. Letters from celebrities were a favourite production of fiction writers and outright forgers in antiquity, and none of the Platonic letters is above suspicion – although scholars these days are inclined to regard the seventh as authentic. But let it stand to Plato only as Plato's *Apology of Socrates* stands to the actual speech of defence that Socrates delivered when on trial for his life; still it would remain the most important interpretation of Plato's political motives to survive from antiquity. Plato speaks of being invited by his relatives and by others he knew in the junta to throw himself in with their enterprise, and of how this excited an idealistic youth – he was in his early twenties – with hopes of a better society and zeal for the power to bring it about. Disenchantment came swiftly. An incident involving Socrates is chosen to serve as an emblem for the regime's immorality: its attempt to co-opt him into the vindictive arrest of a citizen that it had designated a public enemy, and his courageous refusal to do so.

The revived democracy, however, turned out to have as little regard for Socrates' independent character as had its despotic predecessor, and prosecuted him for subverting traditional religious belief – a very serious charge, tantamount to treachery, and a favourite to employ against intellectuals. The resulting execution of his philosophic mentor came as Plato

was once again considering, although more cautiously than before, an entry into politics; and once again he was brought up short. As age sharpened his awareness of the barriers to good government, he tells us in this open letter, he came eventually to understand that no form of government in any existing state was satisfactory, and was driven to declare that there would be no end to the general wretchedness until philosophers, who see justice in all its complexity, were given political power, or until existing rulers learned true philosophy.

Faction

It is a good story, and a poignant preface to the life of a politically engaged philosopher who came to adulthood in the Greek world of the early fourth century BC – a world of small civic communities, independent of each other and jealous of the status conferred by citizenship, yet willing to strike alliances with other cities for self-protection and the discomfiture of their enemies, willing even to accept the hegemony of those cities that sought to extend their power by offering protection, but with all sides aware how readily allegiance grounded only in self-interest can shift. Attempts made during the fourth century to unite the Greek world in 'panhellenic' resistance against Persia went hand in hand with the nostalgic claim that that world had once possessed a sense of its common good, a century earlier, when it had repelled the Persian invader. But if it had ever possessed such a sense, its behaviour belied this now. The common good was rather an ideal for each civic community to espouse within its own boundaries. Indeed, it was by looking to this ideal that the Greeks maintained resistance to the Persian king on a conceptual level even as some of them struck deals with his agents. Throughout the Persian empire, they told themselves, there lived only one free man, its king, whose subjects were his slaves; but Greek cities – those that were not themselves in the hands of tyrants – were self-governing republics, no matter whether oligarchic or democratic, however closely held the privileges of their ruling classes, however restricted their roster of full citizens. For whether political freedom belonged to few or to many, it belonged also to the republic itself.

That such was the ideal is only confirmed by the tendency of Greek political theorists to take a jaundiced view of political reality, and see it as driven by the resentment, avarice and ambition of interest groups. Not only was the common good forgotten in the hurly-burly of factionalism

within individual cities – that is, in the arena where that good was thought to find its natural home – but the factionalism fed off the absence of a common good outside that arena, in the network of relations between Greek cities. Thucydides' *History* (3.82) explains how war between Athens and Sparta at fifth century's end afforded factions in lesser cities a pretext to summon external powers to their aid – Athens if the faction sought democracy, Sparta if it sought oligarchy. In such times, powerful allies were to be had for the asking. The general pattern did not cease with the war of which Thucydides wrote, but persisted and ramified well into the fourth century even as the power blocs became less well defined – Sparta declining, Athens reviving, and Thebes becoming prominent. It was characteristic of the political discourse of the time to polarise the troubles into an antagonism between oligarchy and democracy, and this in turn into an antagonism between rich and poor.

Such an analysis was not wholly accurate, as Plato knew. Some oligarchies and democracies were more oligarchic or democratic than others; the dichotomy did not in any case exhaust the range of political systems; in many places there existed what the Greeks too called a middle class. However frequent the calls for cancelling debts and redistributing land, the prize contested was political at least as much as economic. Democratic Athens had its disparities of wealth – indeed, the rich were relied upon to fund public services – but political power and legal entitlement extended to all adult male Athenians. Everywhere struggle would typically begin as a division within the elite: between those who would and those who would not strike political bargains with the populace. Despite these caveats, it is understandable that a concerned observer in the fourth century would think the world trapped on a factional see-saw. A reader of the *Seventh Letter* can well believe that Plato, who saw the man he declared the most virtuous of his time suffer first under Critias and his oligarchy and again under democracy, would finally cry: a plague o' both your houses.

So it is at first sight surprising when Callipolis, the ideal city conceived in the *Republic*, turns out not only to conform to the constitution that Critias sought to impose on Athens, but to push it further than perhaps even Critias could have imagined.

A Spartan utopia?

The foreign power that supported Critias' coup was Sparta. For a well-born Athenian such as Critias to be a lover of Spartan ways was nothing

unusual. His varied writings, of which we have only fragments, included laudatory descriptions of the Spartan system, and he was followed in this practice by another of the gentlemen among Socrates' companions, Xenophon, whose *Spartan Constitution* survives entire. Athenians with oligarchic sympathies or elitist attitudes were often accused of acting like Spartans, and some went so far as to dress and wear their hair in the Spartan fashion. But none went so far as Critias, who seems to have wanted to remake all Athens in the image of Sparta.

The contrasts between the Athenian and Spartan systems were stark in a number of ways. In social geography: while Athens was at pains to distribute the privileges of citizenhood uniformly through the district under its direct control, the Spartan region had a core of citizens surrounded by non-citizen subordinates in the villages and countryside. In their economy: whereas Athenians of all social ranks could engage in a full range of commercial, agricultural and other activities likely to produce wealth, the small and tight-knit group of full Spartan citizens lived off the agricultural surplus produced by a large body of public serfs, and were expected to hold themselves aloof from money-making pursuits. In their military organisation: Spartiates (Spartan citizens) were full-time warriors, who messed together even when not on campaign, and identified themselves by the privilege of bearing arms that non-citizens were issued only at need; most soldiers and sailors who fought for Athens, by contrast, were called up at times of campaign from the body of regular citizens. In their degree of openness: Athens encouraged foreigners to settle (as the statesman Pericles encouraged Polemarchus' father Cephalus to emigrate from Sicily), naturalised religious cults (as with the cult of Thracian Bendis), and welcomed artistic variety and experiment; Sparta was far more cautious on all these fronts.

Seen against this background, the actions of the Thirty reflect the values of their sponsors. They drew up a list of some 3,000 supporters – about the number of Spartiates at the time – disarmed the rest, and banned them from living within the city limits. They made particular targets of immigrants. The relation they began to establish with the 3,000 was analogous to that between the conservative *gerousia* or senate of Sparta and the collective body of Spartiates. They did all this, we are told, in the cause of purging the city of unjust men and inclining it to virtue and justice. For the fame of Sparta depended not on its actions abroad or its glamour at home but on a distinctive way of life. Sparta was nothing without the lengthy, rigorous and uniform education towards virtue

that it imposed on the Spartiate youth, with the aim of producing well-disciplined men and indeed women of honour, bearers of an austere and martial culture that smothered internal faction and gave the place its reputation for *eunomia*, law and order.

If the rule of Critias was too brief and too harried for us to be sure of its ultimate direction, there can be no doubt that a contemporary reader would have detected more than a whiff of Sparta in his cousin's Callipolis. It too is a city distinguished by the way of life of its military elite, the guardians, who devote themselves entirely to the tasks of defence and policing, and have their material needs provided by a subordinate class of farmers and artisans. The city stands or falls by the upbringing and education of its guardians, a notably austere and conservative process of inculcating discipline and shaping good character. Women among the guardians share the men's way of life to an unusual degree. And in a remarkable passage at the end of Book 7, it is suggested that the quick and easy way to bring all this about would be for those in power to ban everyone over the age of ten from living within the city limits, so as to educate the children in isolation from their parents.

But what would the contemporary reader have made of this quasi-Sparta, this post-Critian coup, when he discovered that the rulers of Callipolis were to be no mere senate of worthies, but philosophers, intellectuals risen from the guardian ranks and educated in mathematics and disputation? Such subjects formed no part of Spartan education; Sparta was a notoriously unbookish place, whose fighters prided themselves on avoiding fancy talk. And would the counts laid against 'timocracy', the first of the unjust societies considered in Book 8, have reinforced this reader's puzzlement, or dispelled it? The timocratic society values militarism and puts the man of honour above all others; its failings are those of a contemporary Sparta, untempered by the intellectual virtues.

For all that the institutions of Callipolis draw inspiration from historical revolutions and familiar societies, in the end they transcend anything known to the Greek world. The discussion sets itself the task of discovering a just city, but finds that it cannot stop short of utopia. How seriously Plato took this utopian vision has long been a controversial issue. The main line of debate divides those who see Callipolis as an ideal whose function is to motivate efforts at personal, not civic, perfection, from those who see it as a guide for future progress on the political, not just the individual level. A different school of thought has denied that Plato intended Callipolis even to seem desirable, let alone practicable. The

question whether the *Republic* is a work primarily of moral or of political philosophy will be addressed in later sections (pp. xxii–xxix). While we are still tracing the work's historical context, let us consider instead the utopian ideas current in Plato's day. Here the fantastic and serious elements are more readily distinguishable than in the *Republic*.

The fantastic we find most clearly in the comedies of Aristophanes – in the Cloud-cuckoo-land of *Birds*, the city in the sky where dreams of absolute power come true; in the means to panhellenic peace and salvation proposed in *Lysistrata*, when the women bring their warring husbands to terms by going on a sex-strike; in the women's rule that comes about in *Women at the Assembly* (or *Ecclesiazusae*), in which the women of Athens, disguised as men, first vote themselves into power, then achieve social concord by equalising distribution of the two great objects of social desire: women and wealth. Equal distribution of property was first proposed, we are told, by a serious utopian theorist, a certain Phaleas of Chalcedon. Less shadowy is Hippodamus of Miletus – a likely model for the Aristophanic geometer and town-planner Meton who offers to lay out the 'streets' of Cloud-cuckoo-land on a radiating pattern. Hippodamus' theories were those of the social engineer and the architect, and sometimes of both together, as in his proposal to divide land according to the occupations and needs of the various classes in the city. He argued for a strict division of the citizenry into three functional groups, although his were farmers, artisans and warriors rather than the producers, warriors and philosopher-kings of the *Republic*. In town-planning his name was associated with the strictly regular geometric line, and some of his layouts were actually built – among them that for the Piraeus, where he lived and worked. In general, the modern reader should bear in mind the ease with which cities in the Greek world could be rebuilt, relocated, or started from scratch. Although Socrates in the *Republic* makes it clear that he is using a metaphor when he calls himself and his discussion partners the founders of Callipolis, starting a new township would not have been regarded as pie-in-the-sky. There is a story that Plato himself was asked to write the laws for one such city, Megalopolis in Arcadia, but refused on the grounds that the new citizens were unwilling to accept equality of possessions.

Yet the town-planner's vision of utopia, the detailed topographic fantasy that became a fixture of utopian writing in Plato's immediate aftermath and marks out the canon from Thomas More's *Utopia* to William Morris' *News from Nowhere*, is notably absent from the *Republic*.

Plato reserves this motif for the twin dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*, in which a character Critias who is either the familiar tyrant or an ancestor meant to remind us of him takes a social system purporting to be that of Callipolis and projects it backwards in time onto a primeval Athens. He then tells the tale of its struggle with the now vanished island city of Atlantis, whose glittering palaces and concentric network of canals he lovingly describes. The kinds of writing with which the *Republic* invites comparison have less of Shangri-La about them and are more overtly political.

The philosopher and the king

One of these genres we have encountered already, exemplified by Critias' and Xenophon's writings on the constitution of Sparta. Their manner of contributing to the lively contemporary debate on the relative merits of different constitutions was to offer a partisan, idealised description of just one. Alternatively, a single constitution might be selected for criticism, not praise – as with the *Athenian Constitution* that survives from the late fifth century by an unknown author often called 'The Old Oligarch'. The traditional title of the *Republic* conceals an allusion to such works as these. For if *Politeia* can in Greek name a kind of community that governs itself and has no truck with tyranny – '*Republic*' is not an outright misnomer – it is also the normal Greek word for 'constitution'. It was not, then, a *Spartan Constitution* or an *Athenian Constitution* that Plato wrote, but simply a *Constitution.*

When judging constitutions against each other, fourth-century theorists often grouped them into three broad types, complicating the earlier antithesis of oligarchy and democracy by the addition of monarchy. The figure of the king became an important focus for reflection on the powers of men – not only the power of the ruler over those he rules, but the power of a human being to live successfully. The concentration of authority in a single individual fused the moral with the political, made the king's actions on the political plane an expression of his personal virtue and an exercise in self-development. This at least was the theme of a second kind of writing that bears comparison with the *Republic.* It is represented for us by works such as Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*, a romanticised biography of the Persian king, in which the difficult relation between republican and imperial politics is filtered through the virtues of that princely paragon. Here too belong the Cyprian orations of Isocrates (*To Nicocles*; *Nicocles, or the Cyprians*; and *Evagoras*), which contain his opinions on the

duties that bind kings to their subjects and subjects to their kings. Cyrus was long dead by Xenophon's time, King Nicocles of Cyprus not only alive but an active patron of Isocrates; yet both writers fictionalise their enlightened monarchs.

And if the king was no enlightened monarch but an arbitrary despot whose will was law? Then a Xenophon could imagine him confessing his unhappiness, as in *Hiero*, in which the Sicilian tyrant of that name laments his loveless life in conversation with the wise Simonides, who consoles him with some careful advice on gaining popularity. The early model for such a scene – the confrontation of philosopher and tyrant – can be found in Herodotus' *History* (1.30–33), where Solon, Athenian sage and statesman, and ancestor of Plato, denies King Croesus the satisfaction of being judged the most fortunate of men.

Xenophon and Isocrates had both been associates of Socrates; other 'Socratics' too, to judge by the titles of their lost or fragmentary works, wrote on the topic of kingship and government, and Plato was not the first among them to write Socratic dialogues. The *Education of Cyrus* was already matched with the *Republic* in antiquity. Isocrates never wrote a Socratic dialogue, but did establish a school of 'philosophy' – his name for what he taught, although he rejected speculative and cosmological inquiry as too abstruse and offered himself rather as a master of the art of words and a model for emulation by the civic-minded and politically thoughtful. The school seems to have maintained an uneasy rivalry with the group of students and companions that Plato attracted to his home near a public park just outside Athens, named after an obscure local divinity, Academus. In this Platonic 'Academy' astronomers and mathematicians were welcome, and the training given to philosopher-kings in the *Republic* is usually taken to reflect this fact. *Philosophia* was still an elastic word, and embraced intellectual activities of many sorts.

Plato wrote the *Republic*, then, not only as a concerned member of the political elite and a keen observer of contemporary troubles, but as a writer who looked back at literary models and askance at literary competitors. The *Republic* fits a mould when it indicts the wretched condition of the tyrant from the perspective of the sage, and when it brings its political and moral reflections to a focus in the figure of the enlightened king. But Socrates, although he is a wise man summoned by the social elite to say his piece on virtue and happiness, is not in dialogue with either kings or tyrants; rather, in this case the advice of the philosopher is that the philosopher should remain no mere adviser but should himself become

king, or kings become philosophers. We are to imagine a sage who could counsel himself on kingly happiness, for he would himself be king. Here Plato breaks the literary mould.

Indeed, we may suspect that the considerable fanfare that attends Socrates' proposal is Plato's way of claiming originality more as a literary writer and educational theorist than as a political reformer. Socrates treads very carefully and makes a great show of hesitation before coming out with his advice; his audience reacts to it as if it were quite outrageous (473c–474a). Yet, historically, the coincidence of philosophic ability and political power in notable individuals was by no means unprecedented. One intellectual who drafted a code of law has already been mentioned: Solon, Plato's sixth-century ancestor, who not only brought social reform to Athens but composed poetry on the political issues he was responsible for resolving. Another example is furnished by the 'sophist' (itinerant professor) Protagoras, who wrote the laws for Thurii, and is mentioned in the *Republic* (600c). We have seen that Critias too could have thought himself, at first, something of a philosopher-king.

More generally, philosophers of the sixth to fifth centuries tended to belong to the upper echelon of their communities and for that reason alone would have been called upon for political office – a duty not a few of them are reported to have fulfilled. Or consider the Pythagoreans, who followed a strict regimen of life designed to prepare their souls for the next world, a regimen that ranged dietary taboos together with the practice of philosophy. Beginning in the fifth century, they rose to political power in southern Italy. Many aspects of Pythagorean philosophy, including its mathematical emphasis, are thought to have left their mark on Plato – although the issue of intellectual indebtedness is complicated by the scarcity of good evidence for Pythagoreanism in its early days. But one Pythagorean philosopher, we are told, was not only an intellectual influence on Plato but his political ally and his host: Archytas of Tarentum, seven times elected to the leadership of his city. He was an expert in military ballistics as well as mathematical theory, and his city was later praised by Aristotle for its innovative and socially cohesive politics. Archytas plays a considerable role in the *Seventh Letter*; and some have detected him behind the mask of Timaeus, the otherwise unknown and doubtless fictional philosopher from southern Italy whom Plato makes the principal speaker in his dialogue of that name, and who is introduced as one who has scaled the twin heights of political office and philosophic achievement.

So Plato is exaggerating when he allows the prospect of philosophers in power to seem as preposterous and laughable as ever Aristophanes did the spectacle of the rule of women. Why does he do it? One likely reason is that the reaction to this proposal justifies Socrates in giving a lengthy defence of his conception of the genuine philosopher, in the course of which he explains the position of philosophers in Athenian society, both those who are worthy of the title and those who are not, and lays out a curriculum of philosophic education. From that curriculum the art of words taught by the likes of Isocrates is strikingly absent. A common word for politician at Athens was simply 'speaker', *rhētōr*, for it was by speaking in public assembly that a citizen typically made his way to prominence. Glaucon, whose impetuousness is both displayed and remarked upon in the *Republic*, apparently attempted to speak in the assembly before he was twenty years old – a mark of extreme political ambition. Certainly he and his brother are given the longest and most eloquent political speeches in the work. In the preface to his *Nicocles*, Isocrates writes of the hostility aroused by the eloquence of those who study philosophy – in his sense of the term – and how they are suspected of aiming at selfish advantage rather than virtue. The philosopher-kings whose viability Socrates eventually gets Glaucon and Adeimantus to accept are truer to the Spartan model, and avoid eloquence. Their political rhetoric is a matter of knowing how to keep things hidden from citizens whom the truth would only harm; their art of disputation, the coping-stone of their education, aims to tell things as they are. All this, of course, from the pen of a consummate master of the art of words. Plato is taking his stand, not against eloquence as such, but against its contemporary place in politics and in the education of those who took part in politics.

Both Plato and Isocrates educated politicians. But whereas Isocrates began from his communicative art, and argued that the task of discovering the most decorous considerations with which to frame discourse directed at others on the worthiest of topics cannot but leave its mark on the practitioner's conduct, whether public or private, Plato seems rather to have begun from a conception of virtue as self-possession and self-understanding – attributes that are in a way the precondition of the philosophic life, yet also expressed by it, and in another way its goal – and to have wanted the character of the man to stamp his political discourse, not the discourse to stamp the man.

Nevertheless, it would be easy to exaggerate the contrast between Plato and Isocrates. Both men seem in practice to have been more interested in

promoting competent government of whatever form than in seeing a particular constitution come into being. Plato's associates and students in the Academy were a diverse company: some were connected to the school for many years, and lived primarily intellectual lives, interrupted in a few cases by stints as lawgivers or ambassadors; others were young men from prominent families who came to complete their education. There were foreigners in both categories. While some among the prominent visitors returned home to rule as autocrats, others went back to tumble autocrats from power. In general, almost all varieties of political sympathy can be found among Plato's associates, whether in foreign affairs (pro-Spartan, pro-Athenian, pro-Macedonian) or in constitutional preference.

Plato's own most notable political adventure fits the grand tradition of Solon and Croesus. He became involved with the politics of Syracuse and the dynasty of Dionysius I, the outstanding tyrant of his age, who won himself an empire in Sicily and made Syracuse the glittering embodiment of his personal wealth and magnificence. Dionysius became stereotyped as an enemy of liberty, and his rise to power is thought to have helped shape Plato's account of the onset of tyranny in Book 8. A notable aspect of his court's magnificence was its hospitality towards poets, artists, intellectuals; and Plato was one of the visitors. Stories of his debunking the tyrant's self-image to his face seem too good to be true, too closely modelled on Herodotus. More credit is given to the narrative of Plato's later visits to serve as philosophic mentor for the tyrant's successor, Dionysius II, and of his failure to influence the unworthy and recalcitrant young autocrat. For the details we must rely once more on the *Seventh Letter*. Yet even trusting its portrait of a Plato bent on practising what he has hitherto preached, what we find here are political proposals at once bland and constrained by the Sicilian context. Dionysius was to have some moral fibre infused in him, then to be sent out to unite the Sicilian cities against Carthage, the foreign invader. There is no talk of a guardian class, no call to give women a role in government or to redistribute wealth – no Callipolis in view.

Plato was a thinker, a teacher, a writer fully enmeshed in the controversies of his time, both political and intellectual. Had he been less of his time he would not, perhaps, live so fully on our page.

A political work?

For all the historical particularity of the *Republic*, it has also achieved enduring recognition as a classic of political philosophy. Its position

within the range of political philosophy, however, has proved more difficult to pinpoint than the work's canonical status might lead one to expect. Some, indeed, have wondered whether it ought to be considered a political work at all. Does it not set out to answer a problem of individual rather than collective action, and demonstrate the claim of morality on individual choice and its effect on individual well-being, regardless of social consequences (367b–e)? Does Socrates not explicitly subordinate politics to psychology, describing social structures only as an analogue for corresponding structures of character within the individual (369a)? In which case, it would be better to think of the *Republic* as a work of moral philosophy. Others have chosen to emphasise the fact that its proposals for social reform – its utopian refashionings of education, of property-rights, of the very structure of the family – go well beyond what correspondence with the individual would require, and seem to be developed for their own sake. Even where that correspondence is more strictly observed, in the parallel analyses of unjust societies and individuals that fill Book 8, the critique of actual social conditions that emerges from the correspondence has a relevance and bite of its own.

Yet if the *Republic* would on this account merit its classification as a political work, disagreement returns with the attempt to classify its political stance. Concentrate on its desire to secure collective happiness (420b), its warnings against disparities of wealth and against the mercantile ethos (421d–e, 556c), its efforts to avoid oppression of the weak by the powerful in society, and you may find in it the first stirrings of socialism. Look rather towards its restriction of political power to a tiny elite (429a, 491a), consider their status as moral paragons and saviours (487a, 463b), their centralised control of the moral and cultural as well as economic life of the society, their eugenic techniques (458c–461e), their resort to censorship and to outright deception in order to preserve order and promote good behaviour (389b–c, 414b, 459c–d), and you may think you are reading a prescient charter for fascism – as did some scholars, approvingly, before the Second World War, and many, disgustedly, in its aftermath.

One modern stance whose ancestry it would occur to no one to trace back to the *Republic* is liberalism. What could be further from an ideal of collective self-rule through elected government and uncensored discussion than the political life of Callipolis? In a liberal society, there are for political purposes no morally superior human types, but Callipolis – to describe it now in its own terms rather than with modern categories – is

an aristocracy of the virtuous. Philosophers qualify to form its ruling class by their moral and intellectual excellence – their natural superiority, reinforced and perfected by careful education. Should the *Republic*'s theoretical descendants therefore be sought rather in the varieties of republicanism, which, broadly understood, elevates ideals of citizenship and community over individualism, and assigns to politics the goal of promoting virtue? Certainly, Socrates does not hesitate to attribute wisdom and courage to Callipolis as a whole even though the virtues in question are restricted to small classes within the populace (428b–430c) – much as each Greek republic called itself a free and self-governing community no matter how restricted its citizen-roll or governing class. He sets himself the goal of making the entire society flourish, preventing any particular class or individual from flourishing at the expense of the whole (420b–421c). And he sums up the task of his philosopher-kings as that of modelling the community as closely as possible on permanent ideals of virtue (501b).

Yet for all that, it is rather Aristotle's *Politics*, with its famous declaration that man is a political animal, and that the purpose of society is not mere life but a good life, that is the more whole-hearted inaugurator of this tradition. A reader of the *Republic* is unlikely to come away with so celebratory a sense of the possibilities of the self-governing community. Reservations come to a focus at one of the work's central and most disconcerting ideas: that a society should be governed by those who show least eagerness for the task. The idea appears in other writers, including Isocrates and Aristotle, but in connection with conventional political complaints. They frown upon excessive ambition, or sigh for an earlier age when the socially eminent engaged in public life from a sense of their station and its duties. Such thoughts make their appearance in the *Republic* also (347b, 520b–d), but are developed in the direction of outright disenchantment with the political life – famously allegorised in the philosophic soul's escape from the dim and constricted cave of its cultural environment to the sunlit, open spaces of true understanding (514a–517c).

The philosopher, even the philosopher who becomes king, does not look to society as the realm in which to exercise his freedom and realise his virtue, but looks rather to the life of the mind for his liberation; nor does he define himself by his social station or the values of citizenship, but by his individual search for wisdom. For a work that is, in truth, no ancestor of liberalism, the *Republic* lays an unusual emphasis on the indi-

vidual; however, it regards individuality not as a possession that confers rights on all and gives society its defining basis, but as an achievement of the few – an achievement in which society can play, at best, only a supporting role. Small wonder, then, that some have doubted whether the *Republic* is truly a political work. One might say, rather, that it is counter-political.

City and soul

Consider how the discussion develops in its early stages. Glaucon offers an account of the origins of justice and law. Human beings were driven to accept legal limits on their urge to take advantage of each other because they judged the unfettered satisfaction of that urge not worth the distress of finding themselves at the receiving end of the conduct to which it prompted others also – a result that only the strongest could entirely avoid (358e–359b). To establish settled laws as the criterion of right and wrong is therefore to impose restrictions on nature, for it is human nature to thrust oneself forward at the expense of others. There is loss as well as gain: the pre-eminence of natural superiority vanishes. A 'real man', one who could always prevail, would never agree to restrict his power (359b). The story of society's origins that Socrates hypothesises in reply presents communal life rather as an organic development that brings us happiness at no cost to our nature. Since none of us is self-sufficient, each will seek to co-ordinate his efforts with others so as to provide for the needs common to all. Individuals will gravitate towards the tasks for which they are naturally suited, and specialise in those, because their needs will be more efficiently addressed in this manner (370c). The process gives rise to a simple, rustic community of farmers, artisans and tradesmen, who live a contented and god-fearing life with no apparent need for rulers or laws (372a–b). They co-ordinate their labour as two men will co-ordinate their rhythm when rowing a boat. Identical needs and a common rationality suffice to produce co-operation even in the absence of hierarchy.

This happy scene is firmly dismissed by Glaucon, who finds it quite devoid of the civilised graces – a 'city of pigs' (372d). Socrates permits himself to be drawn into discussion of a community equipped with urban luxuries, including a sophisticated cultural life. This place, unlike the rudimentary society first considered, would have room for intellectuals; yet Socrates' parting description of the city of pigs is that it is 'the true city – the healthy version, as it were' (372e). The healthy city sets its goals

no higher than economic stability and co-operative order among its citizens; the sophisticated city is by contrast bloated and inflamed, and will be driven to make war on its neighbours to feed its excessive appetites (373d–e). However, when the education and discipline necessary for its military class has required a purge of decadent influences in the general culture, and so re-imposed austerity on the city as a whole (399e), is there not a return to health and indeed an achievement of beauty in Callipolis – the word means 'city of beauty' – far superior to the simple happiness of the city of pigs? The matter is not as clear-cut as it may seem. That Plato thought the world a better place for having philosophers in it, we cannot doubt; but we may legitimately doubt whether the goals of Callipolis as a society are any higher than those of the healthy city, the true city that it replaces in the discussion.

One way in which such doubts might arise is from consideration of the similes used to describe the task of the good ruler. The philosopher-king is like a ship's captain or helmsman, who recognises that to steer the ship of state one must have knowledge of the stars, the seasons, the winds. It is not enough, as politicians in a democracy believe, merely to persuade the shipowner – the populace – to let one take the tiller in hand (488a–e). A port of destination has no importance in this analogy and is not mentioned. When the demagogic sailors take control, their aim is not to set a new course but to feast on the ship's stores and turn the voyage into a carousal. Society is simply a ship at sea, not a ship headed for a particular port. What the true helmsman will do that these sailors will not is use his knowledge of navigation to avoid storms and shoals – to keep the ship afloat. His political goals are limited to security, stability, social harmony. Certainly, he aims to instil virtue into his city, as is clear from another of the similes for the philosopher-king's task, in which he is compared to a painter working on the canvas of his citizens' characters (501a–c); but what he paints there are merely the social virtues needed in the city at large, discipline and justice above all (500d). He himself has become, through his philosophic activity and the perfectly rational order of things to which it has given him access, as godlike as it possible for a human being to be. The city that he paints on the model of this rational order, however, is described not as a divine but only as a human likeness, and its general citizenry are not themselves godlike but only 'as pleasing to god as human characters can be' (500d vs. 501b–c).

The virtuous society and the virtuous individual are indeed alike in point of virtue, and so the philosopher – that paragon of virtue – is akin

to the finest of cities, Callipolis, the city ruled by philosophers (435b, 498e). But consider what this correspondence amounts to. Wisdom guides the life of the philosophically inclined individual and ensures that his material desires do not grow distractingly materialistic – enforcing that prevention, if necessary, with the aid of an ambitious self-respect. The analysis derives from the *Republic*'s theory of the tripartite soul, according to which each person is characterised by a rational or wisdom-loving element, a desiring, material, or profit-loving element, and an ambitious or honour-loving element. Only in the truly virtuous person, however, are these elements properly balanced. Similarly in Callipolis political life is under the guidance of wise philosophers, who ensure that the farmers and artisans supplying the city's material needs keep to their tasks and neither unbalance the economy nor are permitted disruptive inequalities of income, but instead only a decent sufficiency. Should enforcement be required, the military class, which defends the honour of the entire city, can do the policing.

Because of the manner in which the correspondence between society and individual is established – because it is a correspondence of elements and of the relations between those elements – the virtues of the best society and of the best individual can be declared the same even though they come to something quite different. Justice – that multivalent word, in Greek as in English – was first discussed in connection with the keeping of agreements: repaying what one owes, and avoiding fraud (331b). By fastening on the broadest construal of what one owes and is owed, namely as what is deserved, the discussion reviews a traditional conception of justice unemancipated from vengeance, according to which 'an eye for an eye' is the counterpart of 'one good turn deserves another' – this is Polemarchus' contribution (331d–336a). Under Thrasymachus' provocation it considers the idea that what you deserve is whatever your strengths and skills enable you to acquire for yourself. This is the idea that Glaucon reconfigures as the state of nature, and against its background justice appears once more as a matter of keeping agreements, but in the much wider sense of abiding by the convention of law.

Eventually the discussion settles on a definition of justice as 'doing one's own' (433b), where what is one's own is not whatever one is able to get, but what is best for one (586e). Callipolis is a just city because each of its three elements – philosopher-kings, warriors and producers – is performing the task to which it is best suited, and each stands in the appropriate relation to the others. The civic life that this permits is one

of economic stability and harmonious order – values not essentially different from those of the city of pigs, the healthy city. The just individual, by contrast – he of the healthy soul, with its three elements in harmony (444e) – turns out to be no contented pig but a full-blown philosopher, for to take wisdom as one's guide in life is not merely to be rational and prudent in the ordinary sense but to make the disinterested pursuit of understanding one's ultimate value. Only so is the rational element liberated, open to the full range of tasks for which it is best suited: not just controlling the other elements but pursuing wisdom for its own sake (441e, 581b, 586e).

The life that such a person leads is, accordingly, not merely stable and harmonious but godlike and glorious. 'Doing one's own', when it comes to the individual, is more than doing one's part for the community; it is to conduct the business of oneself. Individuality is an achievement, and only the philosopher has the talent to achieve it, for only he provides each element in his make-up with what is best for it. All others may be a part of the just community, but cannot themselves, as individuals, be just. As individuals, Socrates is even prepared to call them the 'slaves' of the just man, the philosopher; as citizens of Callipolis, however, they are called by their rulers not slaves but paymasters and providers, and regard those rulers not as masters but as saviours and defenders (590d, 463b). Each citizen is to find his level; none is to keep his place by virtue of birth alone, but, in theory at least, is to be promoted or demoted as appropriate (415b–c, 423c–d). In this way, Socrates attempts to preserve the pre-eminence of natural superiority that Glaucon thought political life must renounce. Yet he manages also to maintain the benefits of harmonious coexistence that Glaucon claimed as justifying the rule of law in the first place.

The disparity between the philosopher's ambition as an individual and the goals of the city ruled by philosophers becomes only more marked when we consider how the correspondence between individual and society falls out in its unjust forms (Books 8 and 9). It is a spectrum of increasing moral decay that runs from timocracy and the timocratic man, through oligarchy and democracy, and ends with tyranny and the demonstration that the tyrannically inclined man who succeeds in becoming an actual tyrant is the unhappiest wretch of all, and can fulfil no part of his inner being. (Although this decay is presented as a sequence in time, the succession of regimes does not match the history known to Plato – see pp. xiii–xiv – or does so only in certain details, not in its general pattern. But

the pattern is not purely symbolic. For one thing, it surrenders even Callipolis to the prospect of eventual downfall.) Unlike the philosopher, each of the lesser types of person can see only as far as a horizon set by society. The timocrat seeks honour, the oligarch money, the democrat freedom and equality, the tyrannical man an exploitative self-indulgence. It is not simply that these ambitions require a relatively sophisticated civic environment – that much was true also of philosophy – but that they express themselves entirely in social terms, as a matter of one's relations with others.

Mathematics and metaphysics

It may be thought, however, that if Callipolis is ruled by wise philosophers, its civic life is better than stable and harmonious, it can itself be considered wise. And surely the careful filtering of decadent or socially disruptive images and thoughts from the education of the guardians could only be successful if the cultural environment of the entire community were characterised by the austere gracefulness with which the military class must in particular be imbued (401b–d)? Certainly, the *Republic* contains one of the earliest extended analyses (in Books 2, 3 and 10) of the power of cultural artefacts of all sorts to mould the ethos of large groups – a type of analysis familiar in our day from controversies over the influence of advertisements and the censorship of pornographic or violent images. Yet even the inhabitants of so primitive a place as the city of pigs sang praises to the gods – one part of the poetry permitted in Callipolis, with its verses in praise of the gods and of good men (372b, 607a). Similarly, the gracefulness instilled in the guardians by their musical and poetic education aims at and reflects nothing more elevated than social harmony and cohesiveness, together with a piety and a patriotism that fall short of true understanding (386a, 389d–e, 522a).

The education of the most talented among them does not stop, however, at the musical and poetic, but continues with mathematics and philosophy. (Indeed, in retrospect it is suggested that even the youngsters should be made familiar with basic mathematics, 536d.) It is the public policy of the society as a whole that supports this higher education, and provides the conditions in which those with a gift for philosophy can fulfil themselves both intellectually and morally. These are conditions that neither a healthy but rudimentary community nor in its different way a sophisticated but decadent city can provide. Here, in a political system

worthy of him, the philosopher's 'own growth will be greater, and he will be the salvation of his country as well as of himself' (497a; compare 492a). On the other hand, when in Book 4 the whole city ruled by guardians is declared wise by virtue of the knowledge possessed by its ruling class alone, that knowledge has the city for its object – it is expertise in domestic and foreign policy (428d). Only later in the discussion does Socrates make it clear that the knowledge which truly qualifies a guardian to rule is philosophic wisdom, having for its object the whole cosmos (484d, 486a). The question is, how intimate is the connection between this knowledge and the philosopher's political activity?

It is a question surprisingly difficult to answer. As part of the process of qualifying for political power, the guardians are given ten years' education devoted to advanced mathematics, crowned by five years of 'dialectic'. About dialectic Plato is deliberately cagey. It is or involves philosophic disputation, as befits its etymological connection with the Greek word for 'conversation' (534d, 539b–d); it takes a global, unifying view of its topic (537c); it aims to discover the definitions of things, and thereby the unchanging principles of all that exists – the 'forms' – arriving finally at an understanding of the ultimate principle, the form of the good (511b–c, 532a–b, 533b). But we are not told how it achieves this feat, and scholars dispute whether dialectical activity is some kind of metamathematics, or whether it quite transcends the ground that mathematics has prepared.

On the one hand, ten years of mathematics seems too long a stretch for a study that would merely be meant to sharpen the intellect in a general way. Yet we need not regard the education of the philosopher-king, at the other extreme, as an internalisation of mathematical structures that function as blueprints for applying his knowledge of the good to the social world. This would have the consequence that, when we read of philosophers looking to the forms in order to paint virtues on the canvas of the citizens' character, we should take them to be embodying in society a mathematical proportion whose structure they have first discovered in abstraction.

A middle ground between these two positions would be the following. A full ten years' preparation in mathematics is required because only long exposure to the rational order of its objects, in combination with dialectic, can succeed in transmitting to the soul of the sympathetic learner a similarly rational order and proportion (500c). This is consonant with the ennobling effects attributed to the study of astronomy and cosmic