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 Edited by Mark L. McPherran
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Introduction

Mark L. McPherran

The first sentence of Plato's *Republic* recounts how Socrates went on a journey of descent – a *katabasis* – leaving the secure walls of Athens in order to celebrate the introduction of a new worship:

I went down yesterday to the Piraeus with Glaucon, the son of Ariston, to say a prayer to the goddess [Bendis], and because I was also curious to see how they would conduct the festival, since this was its inauguration. (*Rep.* 327a1–3)

With this opening metaphor of descent – and continuing on through its central books of ascent to the final mythical *katabasis* and revelatory reascent (*anabasis*) of the Myth of Er (614b–621d) – Plato's *Republic* announces itself to be an original and revolutionary journey toward the truth, passing through extraordinarily mysterious terrain. This opening also suggests what the text goes on to confirm, namely, that the purpose of the *Republic* is to introduce a new cult outside the walls of the traditional dispensation. The divinity of this sect proves not to be a Thracian night-goddess, however, but the Reality of the Form-world, and its new worship involves not nocturnal horse races (328a), but the intellectual activity of philosophizing whose sacrificial rewards are threefold: wisdom, happiness, and the assurance of immortality.

Plato's text has more than lived up to its author's aims: the *Republic* has proven to be of astounding influence and importance, setting down in a very real sense the central agenda of the Western philosophical enterprise – and everyday undergraduate education as well – up to the present moment. Although other Platonic texts supersede the *Republic* in some aspect or other (for example, the challenging argumentation of the *Parmenides* and *Theaetetus*) it nevertheless brings together all of Plato's prior work, ranging over everything from moral psychology, philosophy of education, aesthetics, and comparative political science to epistemology and supra-sensible metaphysics – unifying them into a comprehensive vision that is at once theological, philosophical, political, and moral. The *Republic*, then, is

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justly celebrated as Plato's central text, and scholars continue to regard it as Plato's *magnum opus*. It remains a basic text in Western education in a variety of disciplines (in particular, philosophy, psychology, political science, classics, religious studies, education, and history) – from high school through graduate education – and continues to attract the attention of the very best scholars in a variety of disciplines. The issues scholars target are also not simply historical ones, despite the antiquity of the text. Some moral philosophers, for example, still think they can discern in the eudaimonistic moral theory it traces out a plausible answer to the live and vexing question “Why be moral?”

The essays that follow are the products of scholars such as these, and thus represent the current state of scholarship on key issues in the interpretation of the *Republic*. These issues are constituted by such questions as: Does Plato succeed in his argument that the life of justice is the most attractive one? Is his analysis of the soul as having three parts – appetites, *thumos*, and reason – coherent and plausible? What exactly is the epistemology/metaphysics of the *Republic* and what are its merits and pitfalls? Why does Plato seem to have to *force* his philosopher-guardians to rule his Kallipolis when that task is something they know that they *ought* to do? What is the point of its strange and complicated closing Myth of Er? These questions and numerous others continue to puzzle and provoke, and in what follows we see some of the field's leading scholars come to terms with these Platonic provocations.

This Critical Guide, then, is not a preparatory book or synopsis for those planning to read the *Republic* for the first time. There are many fine introductions available to that sort of reader, usually accompanied by a translation of the text.¹ Rather, as part of the Cambridge Critical Guide series, this book is for veterans of the text who are looking for thoughtful, detailed excursions into the problems Plato's text and ideas pose. Its aim is to give a state-of-the-art research picture of the most interesting and discussable aspects of the *Republic*, by offering a series of critical, reflective essays rather than providing systematic and comprehensive descriptive coverage of that text. On to our essays then.

We begin with an investigation of the central dramatic character of the *Republic*, Socrates. G. R. F. Ferrari asks how far the Socrates of the *Republic* differs from the Socrates of the aporetic dialogues – those relatively small-scale dialogues in which Socrates questions an interlocutor on his views about virtue, or about a particular virtue, or about some other aspect of how one should live, and which invariably end with their key issues unresolved. At least since Schleiermacher, the *Republic* has been a key exhibit for the

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argument that Plato's thinking and purpose changed as he wrote the dialogues, whether from being open-ended and provocative to being more explicit and self-contained, or from sticking close to the model of the historic Socrates to inaugurating a new philosophical movement.

Although Ferrari does not set out to dismantle these scholarly accounts, he does mark his distance from them by paying close attention to how Plato in the *Republic* distinguishes his narrative control as philosophical author from that of his philosophic character Socrates, the work's internal narrator. It is typical for interpreters of the *Republic* to think of the character Socrates as holding its argument in a tight intellectual grip. Ferrari argues that it is rather his author Plato who does this, because Socrates in the *Republic* is a man beset by the demands of his interlocutors. For example, as he narrates his earlier discussion to an unknown audience at the house of Cephalus, he gives that audience to understand that he himself was taken by surprise at moments structurally crucial to the *Republic's* ever-expanding argument, which we readers can see in retrospect, but Socrates at the time could not. The Socrates that Ferrari offers cuts a considerably less controlling figure than the politic, ironic Socrates of the aporetic dialogues. For, as Socrates's author, Plato depicts him as achieving *more subtle, surreptitious* control over the interlocutors of the *Republic*. Ferrari contends that in this work Plato has fashioned at the level of large-scale conversational construction an equivalent of the small-scale manipulations that shaped the earlier Socratic questioning. As a result, Ferrari's account finds no doctrinal implications in the contrast between the Socrates of the aporetic dialogues and the Socrates of the *Republic*, but rather a difference in dialectical *approach* to doctrinal substance.

Turning to the overall structure of the *Republic*, Rachel Barney argues for a reading of Plato's *Republic* as being systematically ring-composed. The argument proceeds in five steps. First, she explains "ring-composition" (with particular reference to Books 1 and 24 of the *Iliad*) and introduces some terms useful for discussing it. Second, she briefly sketches a range of instances of ring-composition in other Platonic dialogues (notably the *Cratylus*, *Theaetetus*, and *Sophist*). Third, she lays out the five themes or topics that we can detect as (somewhat blurry and interleaved) rings in the *Republic*, from the outermost in: *katabasis*, death, justice challenged and vindicated, the development/degeneration of a just city, and the critique of art. Fourth, she briefly suggests that ring-composition may in Plato be an expression of the "method of hypotheses," or what Aristotle describes as argument to and from first principles – that is, of a mode of argumentation that moves from lower-level postulates to higher (namely, logically prior

and more explanatory) principles and back down again through the former with the deduction of their consequences. Fifth, she offers a reading of the Book 10 critique of art as an example of ring-composition, showing in some detail the ways in which it functions as a “resolution” of the earlier discussion in Books 2–3, and draws some general methodological morals.

Julia Annas next offers us a reading of the *Republic* that connects it to Plato's other works. Annas claims that the Atlantis story in the *Timaeus* and *Critias* is, as many have argued, fiction rather than an account, at many removes, of fact. But Plato often opposes fiction and finds little value, even harm, in concentration on particular facts and finding them important. What is the point, for him, in writing such a narrative? Annas argues that the story presents in narrative form a core message of the *Republic*, namely, that virtue is to be sought for its own sake and not for the sake of its results. The Atlantis story thus has the same kind of point as Plato's myths, presenting an intellectual message in narrative form in a way that is designed both to present “ancient Athens” as an ideal from which contemporary Athens has declined, and to discourage identification with a glorious past on the part of his Athenian audience.

Rachana Kamtekar goes further into the details of the Platonic conception of virtue by observing that although Glaucon's challenge to Socrates to show the intrinsic value of justice for its possessor and Socrates' defense both concern *individual* justice, 61 out of a total of 85 Stephanus pages in *Republic* 1–4 are devoted to *politics*, to describing the city and its coming-to-be. To wit: its origins in mutual need and the division of labor for efficient production of necessities, the expansion of this simple city to cater to the desire for luxuries, and especially the education of its guardians to purge these unnecessary desires. Why are these political proposals so extensive if Plato is only interested in the city as an analogue for the individual soul? And how does Socrates' definition of political justice as obtaining when each class performs its own function engage Thrasymachus' and Glaucon's specifically political claims about justice (that the laws that define justice in any constitution serve the interests of the rulers, that justice is the result of a social contract among the weak to neither harm nor be harmed)? Or if it does not engage these claims, then why not?

Kamtekar argues that the account of the ideal city in Socrates' defense of justice plays the role of connecting justice as a structural condition of the soul and just behavior. She shows that a proper appreciation of the role of the ideal city in the defense allows us to reply to Sachs' famous charge that Socrates' defense of justice is irrelevant; then, she raises a new worry that the defense is question-begging, but goes on to show why it is not. Finally,

Kamtekar draws attention to the methodology of Socrates' defense and its relevance to the controversy in Plato scholarship about the relative roles of ethics and politics in the argument of the *Republic*.

Focusing more on the political concerns of our text, Nicholas D. Smith begins by noting that those who have escaped from Plato's cave and seen the world outside are very reluctant to return to the gloomy world below, but Plato insists that the requirement that they do so is a "just order to just people" (*Rep.* 7.520e1). Their reluctance is an indication of the fact that they do not regard ruling in the state as something desirable in itself – thus proving how different Plato's rulers are from those in command in unjust states. But their reluctance also creates a problem for Plato: One of the main arguments of the *Republic* provides a defense of justice that is supposed to show that justice is always preferable to injustice. Yet when justly required to return to the cave, the returners are reluctant. But are the returners not Plato's philosopher-rulers, who most of all should be aware that justice is always preferable? Whence, then, their reluctance?

Many scholarly attempts to solve this problem (sometimes called the "happy philosopher problem") have been offered in the literature, but in this essay Smith argues that none of those offered thus far adequately handles all of the aspects of the problem. After reviewing others' proposals and indicating what he sees as their flaws, Smith provides a novel interpretation which preserves Plato's claim that justice is always preferable to injustice and explains how and why the reluctance of the returners does not indicate any counterexample to this general rule. The keys to his interpretation are in maintaining, on the one hand, a psychological conception of justice of the sort Plato provides in Book 6, and, on the other, noting that those asked to return to the cave have not yet completed their education. Instead, they are only at the very beginning of a phase (to last the next fifteen years) in which they will be asked to perform services to the state under the supervision of the mature rulers – a time in which their judgments of these particular matters is not represented as inerrant.

Going further in a political direction, Zena Hitz examines the often-neglected catalogue of degenerate regimes in *Republic* Books 8 and 9 and presents them as a philosophical response to fifth-century BCE political struggles in Athens and the rest of Greece. Oligarchy, democracy and tyranny are all "appetitive" regimes for Plato, regimes that involve in key ways the use of desire and pleasure as a standard for political decision-making rather than knowledge or honor. As such, their treatment late in the *Republic* echoes and clarifies Thrasymachus' immoralism (Book 1) and images like the Ship of State (Book 6). In Books 8 and 9, the regimes

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(with timocracy) are distinguished from one another by their dominant ends or guiding ideals. These ideals are all self-undermining: the ideal of honor leads to the base pursuit of wealth, oligarchic wealth to poverty, democratic freedom to tyranny and slavery. It is unclear, however, why degenerate ideals are unsuccessful: whether the problem is that they justify too much (as the democratic ideal of liberty also may justify lawless or tyrannical actions) or whether the claim is psychological and historical (that is, that these ideals, given human nature, lead inevitably to certain consequences). Hitz speculates that both claims are in play, and that *Republic* Books 8 and 9 accordingly work as both a philosophical analysis of bad regimes and as an explanation of real historical developments such as the oligarchic revolution in Athens in 404 BCE.

The *Republic* famously ends with a consideration of the previously dismissed question of the instrumental rewards of justice by first proving the soul's immortality (608c–612a) and then arguing for the superiority of the just life in what appear to be purely consequentialistic terms. In my contribution to this volume, I observe that happy as this account proves to be, critical readers often find it a silly bedtime story – or worse – lacking in philosophical depth and charm. One reason for this reaction is that in the context of the *Republic's* project as a whole, Book 10 can appear to be “gratuitous and clumsy” (Annas 1981, p. 335). This is particularly true because of the way Book 10 spells out the post-mortem rewards of justice by deploying the odd story of Er's near-death experience, a myth whose “vulgarity seems to pull us right down to the level of Cephalus, where you take justice seriously when you start thinking about hell-fire” (Annas 1981, p. 349). It is this myth and this sort of sensible reaction to its contents that I consider. Worse than its vulgarity, I point to elements of Er's description of the life-choice lottery that can appear to undermine Plato's entire moral theory by threatening to eliminate our own moral responsibility for our bad choices while simultaneously convicting the gods of immorally tampering with our fates – contrary to the myth's explicit motivation and Plato's own theology. This essay exposes those elements and offers a first, tentative response to these worries.

The *Republic's* tripartition of the soul is a perennial concern, and on this topic Christopher Shields opens by noting that the *Republic* requires an isomorphism of soul and state: as the ideally just state of Kallipolis comprises three harmoniously integrated parts – Rulers, Soldiers, and Workers – so the just man joins together three roughly analogous psychic parts – Reason, Temper, and Appetite – into a well-structured and unified whole. In terms of the overarching argument of the *Republic*, the partition of the state receives

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no direct argument and is expressly introduced as a kind of macrocosmic illustration of the microcosm of the soul: its heuristic function is thus subordinate to the ultimate task of helping make clear how we should best conceive the fully just soul (*Rep.* 368c–369b). In contrast with the condition of the state, the division of the soul does receive an extended treatment from Plato, who motivates his contention by means of a complex, two-phased argument (*Rep.* 437b–439e and 439e–441c). Although the consequences of this argument for Plato's moral psychology have been widely examined, comparatively little has been done on the seemingly prior question of Plato's metaphysics of soul, and still less on the form of mereology established by the argument he deploys. Upon closer examination, it emerges that the argument does not establish anything like three *essential* parts of soul, with the result that tripartition, though real and hardly illusory, emerges as an *accidental* feature of the soul, a feature in fact shed by the perfectly just man who is Plato's paragon. In consequence, the moral psychology of the *Republic* cannot plausibly be regarded as *requiring* any such division. This lack of essential division, though, is precisely as Plato contends in the last book of that work (Book 10), in a passage perforce disregarded by those expecting the argument for tripartition to prove more than it does.

Turning to the *Republic's* epistemology and metaphysics, J. H. Lesher observes that in *Republic* 6 Socrates directs Glaucon to draw a line whose four segments are said to represent different degrees of *saphêneia*. Although “*saphêneia*” is commonly translated as “clarity” it is implausible to suppose that the different levels Socrates identifies can be correlated with differing degrees of clarity. Images, for example, are not inherently less clear than physical objects, nor are inquiries that make use of visual diagrams inherently less clear than those that do not. Yet the alternative renderings of “*saphêneia*” as “truth,” “precision” (or “exactitude”), and “knowledge” also encounter difficulties. Lesher's review of the use of “*saphēs*” and its cognates by Plato and his predecessors establishes that “*saphêneia*” designated a “full, accurate, and sure awareness,” typically gained by means of direct observation of the relevant circumstances. Viewing “*saphêneia*” in its historical context thus enables us not only to understand the point of Plato's line simile (that is, showing what must be done in order to achieve a full, accurate, and sure awareness of the realities), but also to appreciate that Plato's restriction of “*saphêneia*” to the unchanging objects of thought represented a sharp departure from the broadly empirical view of knowledge held by many of his predecessors.

The literature devoted to Plato's image of the divided line is, of course, enormous. To help us further on this “line of thought,” Hugh H. Benson

notes that this literature is particularly devoted to speculating on the objects of the third section of the line. Despite the attention that these objects of *dianoia* have received, however, Plato's text does not distinguish the top two sections of the line by objects, but rather by methods – the dianoetic method (which leads to *dianoia*) and the dialectical method (which leads to *epistēmē* or *nous*). *Republic* 510b–511d indicates that both of these methods fall under the general rubric of the hypothetical method introduced in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*. The key to understanding the distinction lies in seeing the difference between the methods as being more a matter of degree than of kind. The methods as described in the Divided Line passage are at the two extremes. The dianoetic method makes no attempt to confirm the hypotheses it employs but goes straight to a conclusion, while the dialectical method successfully confirms its hypotheses by means of deriving it from first principles and checking it against all possible counterexamples. When Plato depicts Socrates practicing the method in the dialogues (in, for example, the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic*) it always falls between these extremes, as one might expect.

Concerns about method typically lead to questions about education, and to this topic the *Republic* devotes more of its pages than to any other: the ideal city Kallipolis described in it is in many ways primarily a school – an institution for producing citizens with the requisite levels of virtue or excellence, the requisite types of character. C. D. C. Reeve explores this vast territory, noting that in the *Republic* education is the craft concerned with “turning the soul around, not of putting sight into it” (518d). Here the key element of the soul that needs turning is reason (*logos*) or the rational element (*to logistikon*) (580d). Together with appetite (439d6–7), spirit (439e2–3, 581a9–b4), and perhaps a few other elements (443d7–8), it constitutes the embodied human soul. Consequently, education cannot accomplish its task of reorienting reason without reorienting the whole soul, any more than an eye can be turned around except by turning the whole body (518c6–8). Primarily targeted on the reason, Platonic education is thus forced to extend its purview to appetite and spirit. Hence, Plato's views on education promise illumination on every aspect of his thought: the methods employed illuminate his psychology, since it is presupposed in their design; the subjects studied illuminate his epistemology and ethics/politics since they are designed to produce wisdom and the other virtues of character – courage, temperance, and justice; and epistemology and ethics; and this in turn illuminates Plato's metaphysics and ontology.

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Much of interest has been written recently about specific topics – for example, about the role of mathematics in the higher education of the guardians or about the good and bad effects of art. But neither the *Cambridge Companion* nor the *Blackwell Guide* to the *Republic* has chapters specifically on education. Their neglect is in no way unusual. It is hard to find a good single discussion of what we are to make of Kallipollian education as a whole. Reeve's essay provides precisely that. Beginning with the vexed question of what sort of education the producers are to receive, and ending with the dialectic that is reserved for philosophers alone, he cashes out in good detail the aforementioned promise of illumination.

Giving us more on educational issues, Malcolm Schofield observes that studies of Plato's treatment of the arts in the *Republic* are typically preoccupied with his critique of poetry and his expulsion of the poets from Kallipolis. His much more positive discussion of music, which gives it a central role in shaping individual and society, is comparatively neglected in English language scholarship on the dialogue. Schofield looks first at some of the key passages in Book 3 where Socrates explains the importance of music *in senso stretto* for fostering our cognitive responses to beauty and capacity for philosophy. Schofield then turns to Socrates' discussions of what *sort* of music is appropriate for training the city's guards and how musical *mimēsis* works. Learning to sing and play in appropriate rhythms and modes will gradually shape the soul by assimilation into concordant structures, which will constitute courage or *sōphrosunē* as the case may be, virtues that will then find expression in such music.

But why is it that poetry looms much larger than music in most accounts of the dialogue's teaching on art and culture? One answer is that Socrates simply has much more to say about poetry than music. Turning to this topic, Schofield devotes particular attention to the treatment of *mimēsis* in Book 10's critique of poetry as imitation, and to ways in which it diverges from the treatment in Book 3. Book 10 is undoubtedly preoccupied with poetry, particularly Homer and tragedy, with music barely getting a mention. Its critique can leave the reader with the impression that only bad art is really art, and only bad art has the power of art, gratifying the emotions by its exploitation of the appearances of things. The idea that art might stimulate the learning-loving capacity of the soul is entirely absent.

The role of music in the later *Laws* is something seldom mentioned or discussed when people think about Plato on art. But here Schofield shows that the *Laws* clearly develops further the cultural agenda of the *Republic*, and in doing so leaves Plato's view of the critical importance of music and musical *mimēsis* for the health of society in no doubt whatsoever.

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The chapter concludes with a passage from R. L. Nettleship's *Lectures on the Republic of Plato* which summed up the argument advanced here 125 years ago.

The editor trusts that readers who invest themselves in these essays will find their own journeys through the *Republic* to have been enriched. Although this volume's authors study the *Republic's* many facets in ways that vary – sometimes widely – from one another, they all share the view that a close and careful reading of this work always repays the effort. It is my hope that with their work, a new generation of readers will come to Plato's text with that same conviction. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with these authors on the production of this volume.

Simon Fraser University
 October, 2009

NOTES

1. I take this opportunity to recommend C. D. C. Reeve's comprehensive introduction (and translation) of his *Plato, Republic* (2004). For more seasoned readers, I recommend G. R. F. Ferrari's *Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic* (2007), including his fine Introduction. The new essays here add fresh voices to the perennial discussion of the *Republic* and there is almost no overlap with Ferrari's volume (so rich is the *Republic*), and even in those rare cases where the topics do overlap, the chapters on those topics in this volume offer new insights on subjects that can never be discussed too much.