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978-0-521-54842-7 - The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic

Edited by G. R. F. Ferrari

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

The Cambridge Companion to Plato's "Republic" provides a fresh and comprehensive account of this outstanding work, which remains among the most frequently read works of Greek philosophy, indeed of Classical antiquity in general. The sixteen essays, by authors who represent various academic disciplines, bring a spectrum of interpretive approaches to bear in order to aid the understanding of a wide-ranging audience, from first-time readers of the *Republic* who require guidance to more experienced readers who wish to explore contemporary currents in the work's interpretation. The three initial chapters address aspects of the work as a whole. They are followed by essays that match closely the sequence in which topics are presented in the ten books of the *Republic*. As the *Republic* returns frequently to the same topics by different routes, so do the authors of this volume, who provide the readers with divergent yet complementary perspectives by which to appreciate the *Republic's* principal concerns.

G. R. F. Ferrari is Professor of Classics at the University of California, Berkeley.

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Following positions at Cornell University and Balliol College, Oxford, MALCOLM SCHOFIELD is Professor of Ancient Philosophy at Cambridge, where he has taught for close to thirty-five years. He is co-author (with G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven) of *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1983), and has published widely on many areas and periods of Greek and Roman thought. He has been working mainly on ancient political thought since *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) and is co-editor (with Christopher Rowe) of *The Cambridge History of Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2000). His latest book is *Plato: Political Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

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ABBREVIATIONS

I. PLATONIC TEXTS

<i>Alc.</i>	<i>Alcibiades</i>
<i>Ap.</i>	<i>Apology</i>
<i>Chrm.</i>	<i>Charmides</i>
<i>Cra.</i>	<i>Cratylus</i>
<i>Cri.</i>	<i>Crito</i>
<i>Criti.</i>	<i>Critias</i>
<i>Epin.</i>	<i>Epinomis</i>
<i>Epist.</i>	<i>Epistles (Letters)</i>
<i>Euphr.</i>	<i>Euthyphro</i>
<i>Euthd.</i>	<i>Euthydemus</i>
<i>Grg.</i>	<i>Gorgias</i>
<i>H. Ma.</i>	<i>Hippias Major</i>
<i>H. Mi.</i>	<i>Hippias Minor</i>
<i>La.</i>	<i>Laches</i>
<i>Lys.</i>	<i>Lysis</i>
<i>Menex.</i>	<i>Menexenus</i>
<i>Phd.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Phdr.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Phil.</i>	<i>Philebus</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politicus (Statesman)</i>
<i>Prm.</i>	<i>Parmenides</i>
<i>Prt.</i>	<i>Protagoras</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Republic</i>
<i>Smp.</i>	<i>Symposium</i>
<i>Sph.</i>	<i>Sophist</i>
<i>Theag.</i>	<i>Theages</i>

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Tht. *Theaetetus*

Ti. *Timaeus*

II. MODERN TEXTS

DK H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed., rev.
 W. Kranz, 3 vols. (1906; Berlin, 1952).

LSJ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev.
 H. S. Jones, 9th ed. (Oxford, 1940), with new
 supplement (1843; Oxford, 1996).

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Editor's Introduction

I

When is it that we choose to journey with companions? Most often, I suppose, when we want to make the journey fuller, more pleasant, more vivid. But we may also want a fellow traveler to point out landmarks we might be missing or perhaps to assure us we are headed along the best or safest route to our destination. The companion is not a scout; he does not strike out ahead in order to prepare us for a journey that we have not yet begun. This *Companion to Plato's Republic*, accordingly, is not a preparatory book; it is not written to be read in advance of Plato's *Republic*, still less instead of it. Scouting out the unread text to come is the purpose that introductions to translations or editions of that text legitimately serve; outright substitution for the text is the dubious offer of a thousand Web sites.¹

This *Companion*, by contrast, seeks to walk with those who are already on the road: whether with first-time readers who want guidance as they read or with those second-time readers, third-time readers, or indeed fully seasoned readers of the *Republic* whose desire to deepen their appreciation of the work has not waned and who choose to deepen it in the company of more experienced readers or of their peers.

¹ The service of scout is one that I have myself performed with the introduction I wrote to Tom Griffith's translation of the *Republic* (Ferrari, ed. 2000). That introduction also contains biographical information about Plato that is potentially relevant to the *Republic* and that is not a topic in any of the chapters of this volume. The present introduction has the contents and aims of this *Companion* primarily in view – not the contents and aims of Plato's *Republic*.

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Although the series *Cambridge Companions* now covers most major philosophers and philosophic movements as well as a plethora of other intellectual figures and movements, it has not been the practice to offer *Companions* to individual works. A *Cambridge Companion to Plato* has existed for some years;² why, now, a *Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*?

If I were to reach for a word that could explain why the *Republic* should be singled out for individual treatment among Plato's dialogues, I would say this: that although it is not the most technical or even perhaps the most philosophical of the dialogues (not for the most part displaying the muscular philosophic athleticism of a dialogue like the *Theaetetus*), although it does not ravish the reader in the manner of the *Symposium* or the *Phaedrus*, although it would be pointless to insist that it (and not the many other candidates that have been proposed) is Plato's "masterpiece," still, the *Republic* is, without a doubt, Plato's epic. In its scale, in its complexity, in the inexhaustible abundance of questions that it raises, both hermeneutic and more purely philosophic – above all, in its lissom gravity, the *Republic* is the one truly successful epic to which Plato stretched himself in his lifetime. Do not remind me of the *Laws* in this connection. The *Laws* does not stand to the *Republic* as *Odyssey* to *Iliad*; it stands to the *Republic* as *Finnegans Wake* to *Ulysses*. The *Republic* is Plato's philosophic *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined.

II

At least since that fabled time when Odysseus held the court of King Alcinoüs spellbound with the story of his adventures (Homer, *Odyssey* 13.1–2), large audiences have been drawn to a long and epic tale well told. It is no surprise, then, that Socrates' narrative of his night out in the seamy port district of Athens – a night when his young companions coaxed so many strange and startling ideas from his lips – has taken pride of place among Plato's philosophic works in its popularity with the general reading public for as long as such a thing as the "general reading public" has existed. It has not, of course, existed for very long. Not until the nineteenth century, in fact, did the *Republic* truly explode in popularity, notably in the English-speaking world. It was then that Benjamin Jowett made it a

² Kraut 1992.

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focus of the "Greats" curriculum at Oxford, and thereby a focus of the education of the English gentleman; it was then, too, that Bernard Bosanquet decided to key his *Companion to Plato's Republic* to a popular translation of the day on the grounds that this translation was "of a size and cost which make it universally accessible."³ Bosanquet was tuning his work not to the ear of Jowett's Oxford but to that of the audience who took his university extension classes on Plato and who knew no Greek.⁴

The democratizing intent of those extension classes has since refashioned the university itself. Thus the *Companion* that the reader now holds in her hand, or in his hand, while it inherits that energizing burst of popularity from the nineteenth century, derives its *raison d'être* as much from the diffusion of the *Republic* to general audiences within the university as from its importance to a wider reading public in the university's ambit.

The very features that make for a classic with the educated public may also render that classic suspect to specialists. As a graduate student, I had the opportunity to weigh the solemn declaration made by a teacher of mine in secondary school, that "no man may call himself educated who has not read Plato's *Republic*," against the urgings of an adviser who dismissed the *Republic* as "Plato preaching." (The two remarks are not in fact incompatible, though at the time I felt them to be.) In the days before a general reading public existed, the *Republic's* fate lay chiefly in the hands of scholars. (That is not to say that the *Republic* was written chiefly for an audience of scholars.)⁵ Beginning with the first generation of Plato's successors and continuing through the Platonist commentators in the early centuries of our era, these specialists not unnaturally showed most interest either in the work's more abstruse or in its more controversial themes. They pondered its mathematical, metaphysical, and theological passages; they debated its apparent hostility to the poets, or its recommendation that women of the elite class should have political rights equal to those of the men. As a result, they did not accord the *Republic* that central position among Plato's dialogues which it later

³ Bosanquet 1925 [1895], p. viii.

⁴ For details of this history, see Glucker 1987, esp. pp. 190–98.

⁵ Harvey Yunis in section II of his chapter for this volume considers the extent to which the new prose literature to which the *Republic* belongs was written for more than just a scholarly audience.

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came to occupy; they treated it as one significant member of the corpus among others.

When Friedrich Schleiermacher (the nineteenth-century German theologian, philosopher, and translator of Plato) reconstrued the corpus of dialogues as a systematic structure, one that seats the *Republic* on a foundation consisting of the keystones to the arches formed by more basic and therefore preparatory dialogues,⁶ or when in our own day Charles Kahn traces a pattern by which the aporetic dialogues (those that end with no satisfactory answer to the question investigated) anticipate and build toward a resolution that only the *Republic* provides,⁷ both are responding to the *Republic's* epic quality. It is this that can tempt a reader to seek evidence to show that in the interpretation of Plato, all roads (or most roads) lead to the *Republic*. And such a reader must treat the *Republic* as a unity. Proclus, by contrast, the fifth-century A.D. scholar of Plato, writes a commentary on the *Republic* (it is the major commentary to survive from antiquity) that is actually a series of essays – essays, moreover, of radically divergent length and focus. It is not that Proclus refuses to treat the dialogue as a unity – the unity of its theme is in fact one of the first things he sets out to prove. He is also a proponent of the thesis that Plato sees himself as rivaling Homer, but, typically, he treats this idea in a single massive essay (the sixth) that unearths Homeric motifs and styles in many dialogues other than the *Republic*. He fails, after all, to engage with the work as a unity; in that sense, he is not alive to its epic sweep.

The mid-twentieth-century standoffishness with regard to the *Republic*, the tendency to plunder the text for arguments, especially arguments about Platonic “Forms,” leaving the sense of the whole to be given by books derived from sets of lectures or in any case intended for undergraduates, while turning in one's more serious work to Plato's more technical dialogues, has had the salutary effect of accelerating the retreat from nineteenth-century overreach. The way has been open for some time for scholars to reconsider the *Republic*: no longer insisting on its overall primacy among Plato's dialogues, but maintaining something of the romantic sense of its scope that the nineteenth century bequeathed.⁸

⁶ Schleiermacher 1836, pp. 42–43. (The extended architectural metaphor is his.)

⁷ Kahn 1996.

⁸ Press 1996 provides an excellent capsule history of the *Republic's* reception from antiquity to modern times. See also the other works listed in section IV.L of this

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Nor have they failed to seize the opportunity. The journals abound with articles on the *Republic*. Perhaps drawn by the increased stature of moral and political philosophy and of action theory in philosophy as currently practiced, these articles often home in on questions not readily isolated from the *Republic's* overall argument (or from the ambition to discern such an argument): questions about social justice; about the nature and value of the philosophic life; about the psychology on which the *Republic's* various proposals depend; about whether the work has a utopian intention and, if so, how serious it is; and about whether the larger elements that structure the *Republic's* argument are in fact coherent.

Then there are the several far-from-introductory monographs on the *Republic* that have appeared in English alone over the last fifteen years or so;⁹ there is the ongoing multivolume and multiauthor commentary in Italian;¹⁰ and just the two years preceding the appearance of this volume have seen the publication of a collection of new articles on the *Republic* in French and another in English.¹¹ And yet, even setting aside their evident differences of scale, format, and scholarly affiliation, there is little repetition among these books, so lively is the current discussion. In the ocean of the *Republic* there is room for all to swim.

The time is ripe, then, for a comprehensive book of essays on the *Republic*, essays that build on what the past two or three decades of scholarship have achieved but that do not assume this achievement will be familiar to their readers, essays that differ not only in topic but also in interpretive method, comprising thereby a book that can at least attempt to match the inexhaustibility of its subject.

III

If indeed a reader of the *Republic* who is true to its stature must approach the work as a unified argument, this is a unity that readers

volume's bibliography. For a view of the moral to be drawn from this history different from the one drawn here, see Annas 1999.

⁹ The seminal work in this category was surely Reeve 1988.

¹⁰ Vegetti 1998–.

¹¹ Dixsaut 2005; Santas 2006. Although both works arrived in time to be acknowledged and itemized in the general bibliography, their contents were for the most part not available to be considered by the authors of this volume – except by those few who had access to early versions of particular chapters, whether through contact with their authors or indeed identity with them.

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of the present volume will quite properly construct for themselves. They will not find unanimity among the authors of these essays. They do not have here a book whose authors share a single paradigm and divide the task of presenting its ramifications.

Instead, within this book the same topics often reappear in different colors and are viewed in different lights. This occurs despite the fact that the order of chapters cleaves to the sequence in which topics are presented in the ten books of the *Republic* – or, rather, because of that fact. For since the *Republic* itself makes a point of interweaving its themes – since it is replete with anticipations, suspensions, echoes, and transformations of its leading ideas – the authors of these chapters often find themselves coming upon a common topic by a private route, the route afforded by the particular stretch of argument assigned to them. That they arrive from a different direction may then contribute to the divergence of their ideas.

Take, for example, the vexed question of what motivates the philosopher in the ideal society to return to the “cave” of political life and assume the duties of kingship. The most sustained discussion of the issue that this volume offers is to be found in David Sedley's essay (chapter 10, section II). Although his focus is the discussion of philosopher-kingship in Books 5–7, Sedley finds it necessary to return to Book 1, with its claim that decent men agree to rule in order to avoid being ruled by their inferiors, if he is to resolve the issue and render “the text of the *Republic* . . . entirely and unproblematically consistent in the matter.”

Roslyn Weiss, working at the cusp of Books 1 and 2, looks forward rather than backward and meets Sedley (in chapter 4, section IV) coming from the opposite direction. Like him, she thinks Book 1 has provided the materials for a solution to our question; but she denies that the motive of the “decent men” in Book 1 serves as a template for that of the philosopher. For Weiss, “nothing but justice can obligate a philosopher to rule.” The philosopher finds justice desirable in itself, which is just as well, given that the consequences of justice – as manifested, crucially, in the benefits of philosophic rule – are good for others, not for oneself.

Malcolm Schofield comes on this same problem while working on the “noble lie” in chapter 6 (section IV). His interest accordingly is kindled more by the rhetoric that persuades philosophers to rule than by the traditional crux of motivation. He notes that Socrates “moves

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into direct speech to address his argument direct to the philosophers. He appeals to the understanding *they* need to have of *their* existential situation." And he draws a lesson for the operations of the noble lie; for in both cases the problem is "how to *persuade* the individual to do something required by the good of the city."

Attention to a different kind of rhetoric, that of the discourse between the dialogue's fictional characters, marks Mitchell Miller's response to the issue. Throughout his chapter on the philosopher's education (chapter 12) Miller is at pains to tease out the parallels with the education that Socrates is offering his protégés Glaucon and Adeimantus. Rather than contest directly those accounts of the philosopher's reserve toward descending into the cave that remain "at the level of what Socrates says to Glaucon," he brings to the debate (see his note 27) "the performative tension of what Socrates does with what he says": the contrast between the reserve attributed to the philosopher and the "zest for teaching" that Socrates displays in what Miller regards as an equivalent "descent," his descent to the port district and his generous pedagogical engagement there.

Whereas David Sedley seeks to restore unproblematic consistency to the text, David O'Connor finds in it the expression of two moods that, while not inconsistent, are thought-provokingly at odds: an "active, reformist mood" and a "dismissive, escapist mood." O'Connor is concerned in chapter 3 with the kind of moral guidance that Socrates is providing for Glaucon and Adeimantus; hence his interest in the mood that Socrates might transmit to them. For Sedley, the idea that the only good ruler is a reluctant ruler is "Plato's great political insight." But O'Connor (who is skeptical of how wholeheartedly Plato endorses the idea: "this is still a popular cover story among academics seeking leadership positions") sets in the scales those passages that seem to him to treat ruling as an intrinsic good for the philosopher, arriving finally (this is in his section VII) at an uneasy balance of the two moods: "From this point of view [that which regards the growth a philosopher experiences by ruling as an intrinsic good], political leadership is surely not just the instrumental good of avoiding the rule of worse people. But it is a growth that cannot be pursued. We must await some divine chance to experience it. The dominant mood is resignation at unavoidable loss, lightened only by gratitude for extraordinary beauty."

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Finally, let us give ear to Donald Morrison's caveat on the whole affair in chapter 9, section 1: "the great messy hairball of an issue which is the philosopher's return to the cave has no clear resolution without importing a great deal that is not explicit in the text, so that any answer should be put forward by its advocates as speculative."

Similar chains could be constructed between chapters for many of the *Republic's* main themes. Readers will come upon them for themselves or may trace them through the index. Certainly, then, this book is no chorale for sixteen voices; nor yet is it a cacophony. The sixteen chapters with their divergent reprises surround the reader with a more natural, lively, and varied soundscape than any single source could provide, even one that includes a précis of others' opinions. And lest the reader despair of encountering unanimity in these pages, I mention two instances. The authors who deal at some length with Book 1 (and note that no single chapter is dedicated to that book) all agree to treat it not only as integral to the *Republic* but as anticipating its argument. (The authors are Rowe, Weiss, and Sedley.) Another example: those who directly address the time-honored question of whether the *Republic* is primarily a political or primarily a moral work all respond that it is both. (The question dates back to Proclus; the responses in this volume come from Rowe, Kosman, and Morrison.)

Our book begins with three chapters that introduce the *Republic* whole, although in a variety of connections. Harvey Yunis considers for whom Plato was likely to have been writing, what effect he sought to have on that audience, and what means he applied to bring the effect about. Christopher Rowe then situates the *Republic* in the larger context of Plato's political and (to the extent that the two cannot be separated) his moral thought as this emerges from other dialogues. David O'Connor reengages the reader with the writerly substance of the *Republic* by tracing Plato's activity as reader and rival of the epic poets Homer and Hesiod. O'Connor shows how Plato mythologizes key themes in the dialogue's argument, casting its characters in a variety of roles in the mythic drama; and how that symbolic transformation does not simply duplicate but develops and sustains the argument.

Justice is the theme of chapters 4 and 5: Roslyn Weiss examines Socrates' arguments for the desirability of justice in Book 1 and sets them in play against the challenges made by Glaucon and

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Adeimantus in Book 2; while Aryeh Kosman's focus falls at first on the discussion of justice in society and individual in Books 2–4, then broadens to embrace Platonic metaphysics and the concept of “cosmic” justice. An element of the ideal society's setup that has struck many readers over the years as a violation of justice is Malcolm Schofield's topic in chapter 6: the noble lie. This chapter also broaches the themes of the education appropriate to rulers of the ideal society, and of the censorship of poetry and other media within that education.

Whereas Kosman's chapter considers, among other things, how the harmony of an individual's soul can make for its justice, my own chapter on the three-part soul (chapter 7) gives an account of the arguments in Book 4 that provide that soul with its harmonizable constituents, and makes much of the development between the psychology proposed in Book 4 and that which emerges in later books. Psychology remains one focus of chapter 8, in which Paul Ludwig explains why the management of erotic passion and of sexual mores, which dominates Book 5 and returns to haunt the analysis of the tyrannical individual in Book 9, is of crucial importance not only to the *Republic's* larger moral argument, but also to its political argument. Hence another focus of his chapter is the *Republic's* utopianism. Utopianism is the exclusive concern of chapter 9, in which Donald Morrison argues that the political program of the *Republic* is no mere utopia – which is to say that it is not proposed as an impossible ideal – and subjects to criticism not only the major alternative accounts of Plato's intentions in this regard, but also the sleight of hand that Morrison detects in Plato's own argument.

David Sedley inaugurates in chapter 10 a trio of chapters that collectively discuss the figure of the philosopher-king, the education he receives, and the issues of Platonic metaphysics that arise in this connection in Books 5–7, including the famous allegories of sun, divided line, and cave. Sedley's chapter has two themes: the nature of the philosopher's knowledge, particularly in relation to the art of ruling (here Sedley discusses the allegory of the cave), and what motivates the philosopher to accept the burden of rule. Nicholas Denyer contributes in chapter 11 an account of the divided line and the importance of mathematics in the education of the philosopher-king. This task involves him in explaining more broadly how Plato takes mathematical thought to operate and what role “the

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Good" plays in those operations. Whereas Sedley puzzles over how a mathematical education can be applied to issues of justice, Denyer puzzles over how an apparently moral concept such as the good can be applied to mathematics. Mitchell Miller, too, has much to say in chapter 12 about mathematics and about the cave in his discussion of the philosopher-king's education, but his emphasis falls on the effects of this education within the philosopher's soul – on the "love of the whole" that intellectual purification by the mathematical disciplines can help to induce. Miller's philosopher returns to the cave in an intellectual sense, not just as a political matter: he returns to the sensible. (Miller here seems to join Aryeh Kosman, chapter 5, section VII, in treating the Forms primarily as principles of the intelligibility of this our one world, rather than as constituting a world of their own.)

With Norbert Blössner's and Richard Parry's chapters we return to psychological themes, especially those of Books 8 and 9. Blössner's goal in chapter 13 is to explain the analogy between society and the individual soul that is so important an element of the *Republic's* argument to show that justice pays, and so pervasive a motif in the structure of the whole. His goal is both to show how the analogy works and how it fits within the *Republic*. To that end he draws our attention at every turn to those features of the analogy that seem designed rather to advance the argument of the character Socrates within the fiction than to convince the reader that these are the views of the philosopher Plato and that they are worthy of general acceptance. Among these features would be the tripartite psychology itself. Blössner's chapter thus offers the most radically "rhetorical" approach to the *Republic* of any in the book. For that reason I have allowed it to conclude with a general explanation of its method (section IX) – something that other chapters show rather than tell. Richard Parry follows with a chapter on the psychology of the tyrannical individual in Book 9, the proof of whose unhappiness is in a sense the culminating moment of the *Republic*. Several earlier themes other than the purely psychological come together in this fourteenth chapter: the formation of character by upbringing; the nature and importance of erotic passion; and how that which prevails within the properly structured soul is a kind of justice.

The final two chapters return, as the *Republic* does, to the poetic and mythological topics introduced in this book by O'Connor and

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by Schofield. Jessica Moss (chapter 15) analyzes the arguments in Book 10 that justify the expulsion of "imitative" poetry from the ideal city. She makes a point of understanding the charge that such poetry has a morally corrupting effect – an ethical argument – in the light of the charge that it is "imitative" in nature – a metaphysical argument. Book 10 concludes with a tale of judgment after death and of the soul's choice of a new life back on earth; this volume concludes with Stephen Halliwell's treatment of that myth, the "myth of Er." He does not miss the opportunity it affords to look back on the *Republic's* argument as a whole (for that argument too concerns the soul's choice of good or evil), and he finds in the ambiguity of the myth's perch between the literal and the allegorical an invitation to the reader to hold the conclusions of the entire dialogue in a thoughtful suspense.

For convenience, each chapter includes at the end a list of works cited by author and date in its footnotes, and some chapters append a list of further reading. In some cases, but not all, the concluding citation lists could function as a basic bibliography for the chapter's theme. For fuller guidance on these matters, however, the reader should consult the general bibliography on the *Republic* that I have furnished at volume's end, in which entries are divided first by category (commentary, translation, comprehensive study, etc.) and then by topic (justice, psychology, politics, metaphysics, etc.).

IV

Once the roster had been set, I arranged a conference at Berkeley for the authors of this volume to present initial versions of their chapters and to try them out both with their fellow authors and with a public audience. (I am grateful to the Loeb Classical Library Foundation, administered by the classics department at Harvard University, and to my own department of classics at Berkeley for their support of this conference.) As my editorial work on the written drafts progressed I made efforts to put individual authors in contact with those expressing different views on shared themes. And most authors had their later drafts read by a group of their fellows.

Nevertheless, this volume would not be the book it is if its authors did not work in quite different ways. Some are cracking puzzles in Plato; some tend to think along with Plato and see the world at

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least experimentally through his eyes; and some are dismantling the machine he made, in order to understand its mechanism. And these authors *feel* differently about Plato, too: some are celebratory; others more coolly analytical. All, however, share the conviction that to engage philosophically with the *Republic* and to read its text with all the care one can muster is an activity that brings its own reward. Producing this volume in their company has been a satisfying labor.

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