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PLATO'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

George Klosko

Plato is generally viewed as one of the greatest and most influential philosophers in the Western tradition. His political philosophy is held in similarly high regard and is the earliest comprehensive political view we possess. Plato's political philosophy was profoundly shaped by his social and political circumstances. His political experience was one of general decay and decline. In his view, the traditional *polis*, the main function of which was inculcating its moral values, was under assault from forces of democracy, individualism, and imperialism. Throughout his works, Plato defended the traditional *polis* and argued for the need to pursue values of justice and intellectual virtues rather than worldly goods such as wealth and reputation.

1 Issues of Interpretation

There is considerable controversy about the interpretation of Plato's political philosophy and numerous unresolved issues. In large part this is because he wrote dialogues rather than treatises, and it is not clear how closely we may identify the views of the main speakers—generally Socrates—as Plato's own. This problem is compounded by disagreements about the dating of different dialogues and so the order in which Plato wrote them, and the reliability of certain historical evidence, especially that contained in Plato's epistles, especially the *Seventh*. This essay is not the proper venue for discussing these issues in depth, but how one views them strongly affects one's interpretation of Plato's political philosophy. In order to be clear on the positions taken in this essay, I will discuss the issues briefly.

Most scholars have long agreed on a basic interpretation of Plato's political philosophy. According to this "traditional interpretation," as I will refer to it, the main character in a given work may be taken to express views similar to Plato's own. This is true even in those dialogues in which Socrates largely asks questions instead of presenting views of his own, and the works end in *aporia* or puzzlement. Some degree of interpretation is always necessary for these works, because it is difficult to determine the extent to which Socrates makes points in order to refute his interlocutors rather than to express his own views. Evidence for the former task is that Plato frequently has Socrates use arguments that are outrageously fallacious and must have realized that he was doing so (Klosko 1979, 1987).

Issues concerned with the dating of the dialogues are important because of the appearance that the views Plato presents—whether or not they were his own views at the time of

writing—change over the course of his career. According to the traditional dating of the dialogues, in the early Socratic works, the views expressed probably bear close resemblance to those of the historical Socrates. In the middle works, including the *Republic*, Socrates moves from asking questions to in essence presenting a theory—Platonism—which is one of the great philosophical theories in the Western tradition. In the late dialogues, Socrates generally fades into the background, as other speakers take leading roles. This is true in the *Statesman*, an important political work, in which the main spokesman is an unnamed Eleatic Stranger. Socrates is absent entirely in the *Laws*, which is generally viewed as Plato's last work, left unfinished at his death. The main role in the *Laws* is in the hands of an unnamed Athenian Stranger. According to the traditional interpretation, the political views expressed in Plato's works become increasingly authoritarian over time, with those in the *Republic* and *Laws* markedly so. While there are problems with the evidence for dating the dialogues and some degree of controversy will always remain, the evidence for a developmental view is stronger than for any alternative.

The third issue, also hotly disputed, concerns the authenticity of Plato's epistles. The *Seventh Epistle*, in particular, contains a highly interesting account of the evolution of Plato's political views and his experiences attempting to contribute to political reform in Syracuse, at that time an important city in the Greek world. The views expressed in this work afford strong support for the traditional interpretation of Plato's political theory. He describes his loss of faith in Athenian politics and his conclusion that a just regime will come about only when "those who are sincerely and truly lovers of wisdom come into political power, or the rulers of our cities, by the grace of God, learn true philosophy" (*Ep.* 7, 326a–b), one of the central themes of the *Republic*. However, while this work was until recently viewed as genuine by a majority of scholars (see Guthrie 1962–81: Vol. V, 401; Morrow 1962), prominent recent scholars argue against this (Burnyeat and Frede 2015). It is likely that this issue will never be decisively resolved, and I will not rely on the authenticity of this epistle in this essay.

While views on these issues have always been subject to controversy, in recent years in particular, traditional interpretations have been sharply criticized. For instance, scholars argue against the view that Socrates or Plato's other main characters are simply mouthpieces for Plato. According to one interpretation, the dialogues are dramatic compositions that must be interpreted as wholes—much as one would interpret a Shakespearean or other play. (For references, see below under "Further Reading.") Below, I will note some implications of alternative interpretations for Plato's political theory in the *Republic*. (For discussion of central problems of interpretation, see Klosko 2006a, Chapter 2).

2 Socratic Dialogues

The series of dialogues generally believed to be Plato's earliest vividly depicts the character and teaching of Socrates. There are irresolvable problems in establishing the relationship between the Socrates of these works and the historical Socrates—as Plato understood him—and Plato's own philosophical views. While it is possible that, like a number of other ancient authors, Plato was deeply concerned with depicting the Socrates he knew, it is also possible that he used Socrates as a mouthpiece for his own ideas (at the time he wrote different works). The solution to this "Socratic problem" may well lie somewhere between these poles (see Ross 1933; Guthrie 1962–81: Vol. III; Vlastos 1991: Chapter 2). As noted, in Plato's later works, the influence of Socrates clearly decreases, with Socrates playing far lesser roles in several.

Wherever one comes down on the Socratic problem, the early dialogues explore a range of topics that remained central to Plato's political philosophy. To begin with, Socrates is deeply

concerned with the importance of justice. In a series of dialogues, he argues that justice is not only necessary but sufficient for happiness. As he says in the *Apology*, no harm can come to a good man (*Ap.* 41d). Although he could be killed, that is not true harm, as only injustice, which damages the soul, can harm one. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates develops this view, arguing that it is worse to commit injustice (*adikein*) than to have injustice committed against one (*adikeisthai*). But nowhere in this series of dialogues is there a clear account of exactly what justice is and how it contributes to happiness. A series of dialogues feature inquiries into the nature of other moral virtues, several of which end in general puzzlement. It is not until the *Republic* that questions raised in many of the early dialogues receive comprehensive answers (see Shorey 1903, 1933: 62–73).

Along with justice, Socrates evinces deep concern for a value akin to moral autonomy. As classically recounted in the *Apology*, although Socrates is ignorant about fundamental moral issues, he is still wiser than other people, because he recognizes his own ignorance. Knowing he is ignorant, Socrates searches for moral knowledge and, through relentless questioning, attempts to awaken his complacent fellow citizens. Socrates compares himself to a gadfly, attempting to rouse a lazy horse by stinging it (*Ap.* 30e–31a). He claims that to talk about virtue is “the highest good for man” and that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” (38a). But it is difficult to reconcile Socrates’ professed ignorance with his strongly held convictions concerning the importance of justice (Vlastos 1994: Chapter 2; Brickhouse and Smith 1994: Chapter 2).

More directly, political themes are also featured in these works. A prominent theme is Socrates’ belief in government by expertise, as opposed to the Athenian system of appointing magistrates by lot. According to both Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1395b5–8) and Xenophon (*Mem.* I, ii, 9; III, ix, 10–12), the historical Socrates was critical of the Athenian lottery system, which placed crucial matters of governing the state in the hands of people chosen by chance. To this practice, Socrates opposed the ideal of government as a matter of expertise. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates notes the Athenian policy of turning to experts for advice on technical matters, such as naval fortifications, but allowing anyone at all to speak on political questions. If government is a matter of expertise, then possession of the “political art” should be a basis for political authority.

In addition to its lack of qualified leadership, Socrates criticizes the Athenian democracy for being morally corrupt. In his defense speech in the *Apology*, one thing for which he actually apologizes (*apologia* is the Greek word for “defense”) is his avoidance of Athenian politics. Socrates pursued his lifelong mission of attempting to turn his fellow citizens towards virtue outside the political system. In his role as gadfly, he takes his fellow citizens aside individually, “like a father or an elder brother” (*Ap.* 31b). His reason for withdrawing from politics is that, because of the volatility of Athenian politics, someone who attempted to pursue justice within the system could not long survive (32e–3a). In the *Gorgias*, Socrates presents a searing indictment of existing politicians as panderers to the Athenian people. They tell the people what they want to hear rather than what is good for them. They are successful, as pastry cooks would be successful arguing against physicians before a jury of children. As a result, the citizens’ appetites have been inflamed, resulting in a city that is swollen and festering with walls and harbors and similar trash (518e–19a). In the *Gorgias*, Socrates begins to describe a different kind of political leader, one who would restrain the citizens’ harmful appetites instead of indulging them.

In spite of his criticisms of Athenian democracy, in the *Crito*, Socrates argues for strict compliance with the laws. Having been sentenced to death on charges of impiety and corrupting the young, Socrates refuses to escape from prison, because it would be unjust to do

so. The arguments on which he bases this decision constitute the only comprehensive discussion of the question of political obligation in ancient Greek philosophy. Socrates' conclusion is extremely strong, a requirement to obey the law "whatever it commands" (*ha en keleuê*) (51b). However, not only does this conclusion appear to be objectionably authoritarian, but it is difficult to reconcile with Socrates' views expressed in other dialogues, especially the *Apology*, in which he declares that he will obey the command of the gods and continue his mission, more or less regardless of what the Athenian court demands (*Ap.* 29d–30a; see esp. Kraut 1984).

3 *The Republic: Defense of Justice*

The *Republic* centers upon an inquiry into the nature of justice. (*Dikaïosunê*, the Greek term, has broader connotations than "justice"; it is closer to "righteousness" or virtue in general.) The Greek title of the work is *Politeia*, which is translated more accurately as "constitution." The title, *Republic*, is misleading, as in the work, Plato is strongly critical of forms of government we would identify as "republics."

In Book I of the work, Socrates asks a series of interlocutors to define justice. He refutes all their efforts, the most notable of which is a famous definition of justice as "the interest of the stronger," put forth by the Sophist, Thrasymachus (see Kerferd 1947; Maguire 1971). At the beginning of Book II, Glaucon and Adeimantus (Plato's actual brothers) challenge Socrates to explain not only what justice is but that it pays, regardless of whether one's behavior is known by other people.

In order to respond, Socrates says that, since the justice of an individual soul is small and so hard to make out, he will observe justice in a larger entity, a hypothetical just city. Having identified justice in the latter, Socrates will demonstrate the superiority of justice to injustice by demonstrating the superiority of the just city to four hypothetical unjust cities. Because justice is analogous in city and soul, this procedure will allow him to identify justice in the soul and to demonstrate the superiority of justice, on the basis of a comparison between the just soul and the four unjust souls that correspond to the four unjust cities.

Although formally subordinate to an inquiry into the nature of justice, Plato's account of the just city is clearly intended as much more, as a vehicle through which Plato can present his political philosophy (cf. Annas 1999; Klosko 2006b). The just city is composed of three classes: rulers, and auxiliaries or soldiers, who, together, are the city's "guardians," and an unnamed class of craftsmen and farmers. The city's virtues turn on relationships between the classes, with justice defined as an overall principle that each class should stay in its proper place and do its own job.

The soul is analogous to the city in being composed of three parts or aspects: reason, which corresponds to the rulers; the spirited part (*thumos* or *thumoeidês*), which corresponds to the auxiliaries; and appetite, which corresponds to the workers. In the virtuous soul, spirit is allied with reason, lending reason emotional force to help it keep the appetites in check. The virtues of the soul are analogous to those of the city. As in the just city, justice in the soul is the principle that each element stays in its place and does its own job.

Plato uses the analogy between city and soul to demonstrate the superiority of justice to injustice. Only if reason rules in a soul will all elements receive satisfaction. Unlike the other parts, reason recognizes the legitimate needs of the other elements and pursues a balanced plan of life that works to the benefit of the soul as a whole. This is analogous to how the rulers function in the just city, ruling in the interests of all classes, not their own. In each unjust city, the ruling element is unfit to rule and does so in its own interest, suppressing the other classes.

The result is that the unjust cities are torn by conflict and strife, and something similar affects the unjust souls. Because of their balance and harmony, the just city and the just soul are far happier than the alternatives.

4 *The Republic: The Just City*

The essence of Plato's political theory is straightforward. The purpose of the just city is to make its inhabitants as virtuous as possible, and so everything possible is done to achieve this. The result is a completely controlled environment in which all resources are devoted to the inculcation of virtue. The city's primary institution is the education system. Its other institutions, including Plato's famous system of communism, are intended to provide an environment in which the task of education can be successfully carried out.

As noted above, the just city is composed of the three classes: rulers, auxiliaries, and farmers. Underlying the structure of the city and its educational function are two basic psychological assumptions. First, Plato believes that people are largely malleable. A person is strongly affected by the environment in which he or she grows up, and so can be made virtuous if brought up in a properly governed city. The second assumption limits malleability. Plato believes there are fundamental, innate differences between people. The three different kinds of people—those with gold, silver, or bronze in their souls (*Rep.* 415a–d)—have vastly different capacities to achieve virtue. Although the just city is designed to raise people to the highest levels of virtue they are capable of, the result must be different classes with different levels of virtue.

Plato is unusual in the history of political philosophy in the amount of emphasis he gives to the psychological effects of art, which is a central theme in the *Republic*. In ancient Greece, poetry was the primary artistic medium, and so poetry, especially Homer, receives detailed criticism, in regard to proper rhythms and meter, as well as content. Similar concerns with rhythm and harmony apply to music and the visual arts, though Plato does not discuss the last subject in detail. He believes the arts are most effective with the very young, instilling balance and harmony and preparing children for true moral principles when they are old enough to understand them. As a result of lifelong, intensive education, all inhabitants are raised to the highest level of virtue possible for them. But because of the inherent incapacities of most people, this requires that members of the lower classes be completely subordinate to the rulers.

The just city's major institutions are intended to contribute to an environment conducive to education. As Plato famously argues, the city should be ruled by philosophers. A just city is not possible until political power and philosophic wisdom are joined in the same hands. The philosophers' claim to rule rests on their apprehension of the Forms—perfect moral standards that exist outside the phenomenal world and are the only things that are truly real. This divine knowledge orients the philosophers' desires away from worldly things, so they can be trusted to rule completely unchecked, although Plato does not provide a detailed account of how their knowledge actually helps in the business of ruling. The nature of the philosophers' knowledge and of the Forms themselves are illustrated in three famous images: the Form of the Good as the sun; the "divided line," which presents different cognitive states and corresponding entities at different levels of existence; and the Cave. The details of these images, and of the theory of Forms more generally, cannot be discussed in this essay, although, as is especially clear in the image of the Cave, Plato's metaphysical and epistemological views are the essential underpinnings of his political philosophy (see below).

The other distinctive institutions in the just city are the treatment of women and community of families and of property among the guardians. Plato argues that gender differences

are not relevant to ruling. He is a pioneer in the history of women's equality in arguing that women who are qualified to rule should be allowed to do so. Accordingly, the common term "philosopher kings" is actually misleading in not taking account of philosopher-queens. However, equal treatment is only for exceptional women. Outside the class of guardians, conventional family structures are apparently maintained. For the guardians, nuclear families are abolished. Children are raised communally, and with reproduction controlled by the state, the stock of guardians can be improved by selective breeding. Abolition of the family also makes the guardians in effect one big family, thereby eliminating causes of faction and promoting stability in the state.

As for community of property, the guardians live a permanent barracks existence, as soldiers in camp, with a common mess. They are allowed to possess only their weapons, are forbidden to own gold and silver, and are forbidden houses or storerooms that anyone who wishes is not free to enter. Although it is often said that Plato's just city is communistic, this description is inaccurate. Communism (or socialism) is generally described as public ownership of the means of production. In Plato's city, the primary means of production, land, is owned by the lowest class. There is an element of communism in the city, as the guardians live communally without individual possessions. But this is community of poverty rather than community of property.

As in the Socratic dialogues, the *Republic* is highly critical of Athenian democracy. Central to Plato's critique are the shortcomings of democratic rulers. Their lack of knowledge is highlighted in the parable of the ship of state (488a–89d). On this ship, the populace shows no respect for those who truly understand navigation, whom they view as odd, turning over control of the ship to charlatans who only pretend to have knowledge. Because the mob is emotional and easily misled, Sophists are likened to animal trainers, who have mastered the art of managing an unruly beast (493a–c). To these somewhat familiar themes, Plato adds a wonderful satirical sketch of democracy in Book VIII, which criticizes democracy for treating unequals alike. This holds for the old and the young, men and women, masters and slaves, even animals and human beings. However, more seriously, Plato presents a dark sketch of how the excesses of democracy lead the city to fall into the hands of a demagogue and sink into tyranny.

The dependence of Plato's political theory on objective values that only a few have the capacity to know is illustrated by the image of the Cave (514a–17a). Prisoners in the cave are bound so they can see only shadows that pass on a wall in front of them and contend for preeminence in this shadow world. If they could escape and see the world outside the cave, they would despise their former situation. However, when a prisoner who had been freed from the cave goes back down to free his former fellows, he is disoriented by returning to darkness. He appears foolish to his former fellows, who resist his efforts and would kill him, if they could. Because the prisoners inhabit a world that is not fully real, to attain knowledge and true values, they must move beyond appearances and out of the cave. Notable in this image is the complete denial of the legitimacy of ordinary people's desires—and of the appetitive life, which Plato views with disdain. To be freed from the chains of appetite, people must be educated in a properly run state. Once again, this requires complete subordination of the lower classes to the philosophers.

Because of his overall lack of faith in most people's ability to achieve virtue on their own, Plato believes they must live in permanent subjection to the philosophers. At the end of Book VII, he briefly discusses the best means of bringing the city into existence. All inhabitants over the age of ten must be driven out "into the fields" (*eis tous agrous*) and then the children must be raised and educated properly (540e–41a). At one point, Plato says that after people have

been properly educated, they will become free (591a). But it is not clear what this freedom consists of in the totally controlled, totally censored just city.

It is difficult to know how seriously Plato takes his sketch of an ideal city. Challenged by his interlocutors, Socrates devotes considerable effort to describing how the city could be realized. Though this would be difficult, it is not impossible (*Rep.* 501a–502c; Klosko 1981). But the city is later described as existing only “in theory,” and Plato suggests that it does not matter whether it is ever realized (592a–b).

In the aftermath of twentieth-century fascist and totalitarian regimes, Plato received strong criticism, because of resemblances between the just city and these systems. The most celebrated attack is by Karl Popper, in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Popper 1966). Although many of Popper's specific charges are wide of the mark and his work as a whole is wildly polemical, there is a clear element of truth to the general charge (cf. Levinson 1953; Klosko 1996). Popper's critique, along with similar criticisms from other scholars (e.g., Crossman 1939), raised additional related issues, including whether Plato is a racist (Klosko 1991), and the possibly statist implications of the principles of distributive justice advocated in the *Republic* (Vlastos 1977).

Other scholars have argued against the extreme harshness of the *Republic* by departing from traditional, literal readings of the work. Although these interpretations cannot be proved to be incorrect, as things stand, they are minority views. According to an interpretation, developed by scholars associated with Leo Strauss, the work is a kind of elaborate satire. By paying careful attention to incongruous details and other clues and hints scattered throughout the dialogue, one can divine Plato's true position, which is actually highly conservative. The extreme measures Plato appears to advocate in order to achieve his vision demonstrate their impossibility. According to Strauss, “Certain it is that the *Republic* supplies the most magnificent cure ever devised for every form of political ambition” (1964: 65).

Other scholars argue that the work is much more favorable to democracy than the traditional interpretation allows. For instance, focusing on the inherently democratic character of dialogical interchange in the dialogue form employed in the work tells against its non-democratic overt content (Monoson 2000). Similarly, considering the *Republic* as a work intended to be read and reread suggests questioning authoritative pronouncements rather than submitting to them (Frank 2018).

5 Plato's Later Political Theory

In his later dialogues, Plato's political theory moves in directions of increased realism and pessimism. One possible reason for this is Plato's involvement in attempts at political reform in Syracuse, at that time an important city in the Greek world. What transpired is recorded in the *Seventh Epistle*. Whether or not the work is by Plato, its description of what took place is likely accurate (Brunt 1993). Plato was informed that the young tyrant, Dionysius II, showed an interest in philosophy, which raised the possibility of reform. Although Plato was not optimistic, he decided to go to Syracuse, lest he be “a pure theorist, unwilling to touch any practical task” (*Ep.* 7;328c). Dionysius' commitment to philosophy proved to be weak, and so Plato's efforts failed. Plato was later implicated in the subsequent disastrous invasion of Sicily undertaken by Dion, his close associate (see Morrow 1962).

The most important late political dialogues are the *Statesman* and the *Laws*. In both works, dramatic action is severely reduced. Though the dialogue form is retained, it is largely a shell for authoritative disquisitions by the works' main characters, who in neither work is Socrates (cf. Gill and McCabe 1996).

In comparison with the *Republic*, both works evince a greater appreciation of laws and existing institutions. In the *Statesman*, the Eleatic Stranger argues that the statesman's art should not be constrained by law. If a physician had to be away from his patients, he would leave instructions for them. But when he returns, his expertise takes precedence over his previous instructions, which may be set aside. Something similar holds in regard to laws. Because subjects of laws are numerous and differ in many respects, proper instructions for them must be general, not tailored to specific characteristics of individuals. As with the physician, the true statesman may disregard the generality of laws in order to directly apply his expertise to each case. However, if a true statesman is not available, laws should be adhered to. Although the text is compressed and at times obscure, it also appears that laws should remain unchanged. Laws are necessary to restrain the populace, while Plato suggests that attempts to change them will invariably be corrupted. Although law is no substitute for political expertise, it is a "second best" (297d, 297e, 300c), and Plato presents a classification of constitutions with good states distinguished from bad on the basis of whether or not the rulers adhere to the laws.

Plato's interest in laws is developed in the *Laws*. The participants in this dialogue are three old men, an unnamed Athenian Stranger, a Spartan, Megillus, and Clenias, a Cretan. As the three walk to a shrine on the island of Crete, they discuss the construction of a city, Magnesia, which is going to be founded as a colony of Crete. The *Laws* display deep knowledge of the laws and institutions of many Greek cities, which is obviously the fruit of years of research conducted by Plato and his school (Morrow, 1960). Unlike the just city in the *Republic*, which is designed more or less freely from the ground up, the "second best" city in the *Laws* (739a–e, 875c–d) proceeds from existing political and social institutions, which Plato improves (see the invaluable discussion in Morrow 1960). Plato's basic plan combines a system of political institutions similar to those of democratic Athens and a social and economic system like that of Sparta. Overall control is vested in the laws, which are described in enormous detail. They are drawn up by a philosophical lawgiver and, after an initial tryout period, will be virtually impossible to change. As the Athenian says in regard to laws concerning education, his aim is to emulate Egypt, in which laws concerning music had not changed in thousands of years (656d–57a).

A decisive element in the movement from the *Republic* to the *Laws* is Plato's loss of faith in the possibility of philosopher kings. Even if someone could understand what is necessary to do, "human nature" would impel him towards self-aggrandizement, thereby bringing ruin to the city (*Laws* 875a–d). Because no human being can be trusted with unaccountable power, only the rule of law allows human beings to rise above the level of savage beasts (874e–75a). Along with his abandonment of the philosopher king, Plato appears to place more reliance on the abilities of more ordinary people (Bobonich 2002). All citizens are enfranchised politically, and all live in traditional families. In Magnesia, there are no guardians living apart from and over society as a whole. However, although Plato's attitude towards democracy in the *Laws* is undoubtedly more favorable than in the *Republic*, this still falls short of modern views. Citizens' virtually only prerogative is to help choose their magistrates, while magistrates too do not determine the state's course. This is prescribed for all time by the laws.

The political system of the *Laws* is purged of the excesses of Athenian democracy. As in Athens, important institutions are an assembly and popular courts. But the former is assigned fewer functions than in Athens, while the power of popular courts is curbed by a system for appeals. Magnesia differs notably from Athens in its large array of magistrates with important functions. While the Athenians generally appointed magistrates through the lottery, in Magnesia most are appointed through a combination of election and the lot. Significant

officials include “guardians of the laws,” who are assigned a host of duties, a board of examiners, and a “nocturnal council.”

This last body is composed of high office holders throughout the state. Its ominous-sounding name comes from its meeting in the hours before dawn, a convenient time for busy officials. It is described as a kind of ongoing seminar to study the laws of different cities, with an eye to preserving those of Magnesia. Having described this council, the Athenian concludes the *Laws* by saying that the state must be “turned over to it” (969b). Although this may sound like a return to philosopher kings—which is apparently Aristotle’s interpretation (*Pol.* 1265a3–4)—this would contradict many elements of the *Laws*. Glenn Morrow, the most important scholar of the *Laws*, argues that the council exercises only informal authority, providing advice when it is necessary to change laws. However, in this construal, the apparent importance of the council does not rest well with the rigidity of the laws and the extreme difficulty of changing them. In regard to the nocturnal council, as with other aspects of the *Laws*, it is possible that Plato had not fully worked out the details at the time of his death (see Morrow 1960: Chapter 9; Klosko 2008).

In regard to economic arrangements, the Athenian argues that while a community of property is best, it is possible only for gods or children of gods, and so the second-best state has private property (739a–e). But as in Sparta, land held by each family is inalienable, and citizens dine communally. As in Sparta, ownership of gold and silver is forbidden, while excessive wealth is confiscated by the state. While the traditional family structure is retained, women are to be educated along with men, to provide military service, and to be eligible for public office—although Plato provides few details.

Because their farms are worked by slaves, most citizens have the leisure necessary for the pursuit of virtue. This is their central occupation, and the day is not long enough for all the activities this requires (806d–08c). As in the *Republic*, the need to inculcate virtue is the state’s main business. Poetry and other arts are strictly censored. Magnesia has an intensive system of education, the main emphasis of which is on conditioning and the education of pleasures and pains. An indication of how extreme Plato’s views have become is that the process of conditioning must begin before birth, as pregnant women are to do rhythmic exercises, to make the young balanced and harmonious (789a–e).

Religious elements of Magnesia receive considerable emphasis, arguably taking over the role of philosophy in the just city of the *Republic*. In Book X, the Athenian develops elaborate—though philosophically weak—arguments against common heresies. He proves the existence of the gods that the gods involve themselves in human affairs and that they cannot be bought off with bribes. Although—or perhaps because—the arguments are so weak, adherence to them is to be enforced through a kind of inquisition. People who do not believe in them are sentenced to death, even if their conduct is otherwise exemplary. Thus, Plato has the dubious honor of being one of the first thinkers in the Western tradition to advocate death for thought crime.

The distance Plato’s political philosophy has traveled from its Socratic roots is apparent in the *Laws* (esp. Gould 1972). Changes that appear in the *Republic* are more pronounced in the *Laws*. In general, the movement of Plato’s thought is from the Socratic ideal of moral autonomy to society-wide, intensive conditioning, beginning before birth. Amidst this overall development throughout Plato’s career, there are also elements of continuity, especially the continued emphasis on virtue and government by expertise. To realize this ideal, the *Republic* argues that philosophy and political power must be combined in the hands of the philosopher-king. At the end of his life, having lost faith in the possibility of philosophic rulers, in the *Laws*, Plato focuses on a second-best form of philosophic politics: adherence to unchanging laws constructed by a philosophic lawgiver.

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Quotations of Plato are from J. M. Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997; translations occasionally modified slightly. A full list of the standard definitions used in this essay can be found in various reference works, including Liddell-Scott-Jones' *Greek Lexicon*.

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Further Reading

J. Adam (ed.), *The Republic of Plato*. 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902) is a classic Greek edition, with valuable commentary. Volumes IV and V of W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*. 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962–81), is a judicious commentary, dialogue by dialogue. Vols. 2 and 3 of P. Friedlander, *Plato*, 3 vols., H. Meyerhoff, trans. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958–69), provide a dialogue by dialogue commentary, with more of a

literary focus, while Vol. I is an introductory volume on central themes. T. Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), is a valuable account of Plato's moral philosophy. As its title indicates, G. Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), examines the movement of Plato's political theory throughout his career. M. Lane, *Method and Politics in Plato's Statesman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), is the best recent book on the *Statesman*. G. Morrow's *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), is an indispensable historical analysis of the *Laws*. C. Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) is a brilliant, though iconoclastic analysis of central philosophical themes in the *Laws*. Alternative interpretations of Plato, from different perspectives, are found in G. Press, ed., *Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993); C. Griswold (ed.), *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings* (State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 2001); and H. W. Ausland and E. Benitez, eds, *Who Speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic Anonymity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000). A good defense of traditional interpretation is R. B. Rutherford, *The Art of Plato: Ten Essays in Platonic Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).