# Great Dialogues Study Guide

## Great Dialogues by Plato

BOOKRAGS

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# Ion

## Ion Summary

Socrates meets Ion, an Ephesian man who is renowned for his ability to interpret and recite the poetry of Homer. He has just returned from a recital contest and placed first out of all the competitors. Socrates expresses his admiration of Ion's skill and notes that only a person who understands Homer's meaning could possibly be a good reciter, which statement Ion immediately agrees. Socrates then begins his investigation into whether Ion's proficiency in reciting Homer is an art by comparing Ion's knowledge to the knowledge of others who certainly possess arts, such as religious prophets or charioteers. Socrates concludes that Ion's ability comes not from an art, but from divine inspiration, much as the poets whom he interprets were inspired.

## Ion Analysis

In this dialog, Socrates is concerned with distinguishing knowledge known through art from knowledge known through inspiration. Artistic knowledge is characterized by its universality: If one has artistic knowledge of poetry, for example, one can equally analyze any poet, not just Homer, as is the case with Ion. Further, the various arts neatly define their areas and there is no overlapping. If, for example, a bit of knowledge belongs to the art of riding horses, it cannot belong to any other art. Therefore, since a poem is constituted by statements which all necessarily belong to other arts (for example, when Homer writes about war, he is writing about a subject which belongs to the art of a general), then none of the content of a poem belongs to an art of reciting, since it could not belong to both. Socrates concludes, then, that the ability to recite well is given to the reciter by the gods through inspiration.

# Meno

## Meno Summary

Socrates meets a philosopher named Meno who immediately asks him whether virtue is natural to a good person or whether it is taught to him. Socrates responds to this question with one of his own: What is virtue? Meno responds by listing virtues that are appropriate to people in various states of life, but Socrates is not satisfied with this answer. He did not ask for an enumeration of different virtues, but what virtue itself is. Meno does not at first understand what Socrates means, but Socrates explains that if all particular virtues are commonly called virtues, then there must be some common nature among them, much like there is a common nature among different shapes which makes all of them shapes, even though they differ in what particular shape they are.

Finally understanding Socrates' meaning, Meno offers a definition of virtue borrowed from the poets: virtue is the desire and power of obtaining good things. However, Socrates takes apart this definition quickly by pointing out that all men desire good things, and none desire bad things. Meno's definition, then, is reduced to saying that virtue is the power of obtaining good things. However, as Socrates points out, one is only called virtuous in obtaining good things if he does so with justice and temperance. However, as justice and temperance are virtues, this definition fails: virtues cannot be included in the definition of virtue.

Meno complains that Socrates causes confusion in his speech and Socrates responds by saying that he causes confusion only because he himself is confused about the matter. Socrates says that he is happy to join with Meno in clearing up this confusion, but Meno responds by asking how it possible to learn what virtue is. If one already knows what virtue is, one cannot learn it; but if one does not know what virtue is, one would not be able to identify it once one found it. Socrates then explains his theory of knowledge: learning is really a matter of remembering truth that one saw before birth, for the soul is immortal but forgets its knowledge once it is put into a body. To illustrate this point, he walks a slave boy through a geometry problem in order to show that the boy, who had no prior instruction in geometry, already knew the answers to the questions Socrates was posing.

Convinced of Socrates' theory of knowledge, Meno asks to return to the question of whether or not virtue can be taught. Socrates, putting off the question of what virtue is, responds by saying that whether or not it can be taught depends upon whether or not it is knowledge. This definition seems good, since both agree that it is wisdom—a kind of knowledge—which makes one's actions good, and it would seem that virtue is also what makes one's actions good. However, Socrates points out that if virtue is knowledge, then it can be taught, but if something can be taught, then there must be teachers. However, it would seem that there are no teachers of virtue, and that therefore it must not be knowledge.

There is another alternative, however, which Socrates proposes. One can have a good opinion about a subject without having true knowledge of it, and that opinion will be just as useful to its owner as if it were knowledge, though it is without understanding. Now, since, Socrates says, those who do well and succeed in life without true understanding are considered god-like, it follows that virtue is a gift from the gods.

## Meno Analysis

In this dialog, Socrates raises three important philosophical questions. First, he distinguishes between what a thing is universally and particular instances of that thing. For example, individual bees may differ from one another in many ways, but there is a common nature among them which makes them all bees. Thus, all things of the same type share a common nature.

Second, he proposes a theory of knowledge in which learning is not really the process of acquiring new information, but of remembering knowledge one already had. Socrates believes that the soul is immortal and existed before the body; while it was out of the body, it was able to directly perceive the eternal truths of the world, but it forgot them when it entered its body. That knowledge is still, in some way, in the mind, and through philosophical investigation, one can recover it. Another aspect of Socrates' theory of knowledge is a distinction between knowledge and opinion. Knowledge of a subject implies a full understanding not only of the facts themselves but also the reasons the facts are the way they are. Opinion, however, is an awareness of the facts without a true understanding of their causes.

Third, Socrates concludes that virtue is something which resides in the mind, either as knowledge or opinion, and which guides a person and makes sure that their actions are right and good. Virtue is unteachable, not by its nature, but simply because the only virtuous people he knows are virtuous by good opinion and not by knowledge. One can teach only what one thoroughly understands and has knowledge of, since teaching requires the ability to explain a subject, which one with an opinion is incapable of doing.

# Symposium

## Symposium Summary

Apollodorus is begged by his friend to repeat to him the story of a dinner that took place at Agathon's house in which Agathon, Socrates, and others each gave speeches about love. Apollodorus was not there, but received a detailed account from someone who was, Aristodemus. Apollodorus agrees, saying that recounting it makes him happy because of his fondness for Socrates and philosophy.

As the story begins, Aristodemus runs into Socrates by chance and is invited to come along to a dinner that is being held by Agathon. Aristodemus agrees. On the walk there, Socrates is entranced in thought and remains outside of the party for half of dinner absorbed in contemplation. Socrates returns and as they are finishing dinner, the men agree not to drink, since most of them drank heavily the night before. Instead, Agathon suggests that each man takes a turn giving a speech on the god of love, echoing Phaedrus' concern that few hymns are given to that god. The men all agree and Phaedrus begins.

Phaedrus begins by saying that Love is one of the most ancient gods and that Love had no parents but, along with Earth, was one of the original gods to appear in the beginning. This is why Love's benefits are greater than any other god's. Love, for example, inspires the greatest kind of bravery in people who are worried above all to do something dishonorable for fear that their beloved would disapprove. Phaedrus says that a state or army composed entirely of lovers would be an unstoppable force.

After a few others give their speeches, Pausanias returns to Phaedrus' speech and criticizes him for saying that Love is only one god. Rather, there are two gods of Love. The first god is that god of love of any person, whether male or female. This god is lesser than the second god of Love who is male and inspires only the love of young men, though not children. Pausanias then passes into a detailed description of the laws of various Greek cities on love between grown men and young men and concludes with an analysis of Athenian law, which apparently forbids only those relationships which are harmful or dishonorable. Those relationships which are conducive to virtue are allowed.

Eryximachus, a doctor, takes his turn next. Building off of Pausanias' point that there are two loves, he claims that all arts, including his own art of medicine, are based on encouraging good loves and discouraging bad loves (encouraging the love of health and discouraging the love of disease, in the case of medicine). This pattern of dual loves even extends to nature. When the elements are combined by the good love, they create plants and animals; when they are united by the bad love, they create pestilence and storms.

Next, Aristophanes, a playwright, delivers his speech, which is an intentionally ridiculous tale of how people were originally large spheres that rolled around but one day

conspired together to try to reach heaven and, as punishment, were split in half and made into modern humans. Love is the impulse which makes one seek his or her other half and that is why people in love claim they feel complete. He warns that if men are not careful, the gods will split them again.

Agathon, who takes his turn next, criticizes those who have already spoken for praising the benefits given by the god of love, and the god himself. Accordingly, he describes how beautiful and charming Love is and how he possesses all of the virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice.

Socrates delivers the next and final speech, but first briefly interrogates Agathon about his speech, proving to him that love cannot be beautiful. Socrates claims that he learned about love from a prophetess named Diotima. According to Diotima, love is not noble or beautiful, but crude and deceitful, unlike the pleasant picture painted by Agathon. Love is really the desire for immortality, says Diotima, and the truest expression of love lies not in the production of offspring through physical love, but in the production of ideas through a kind of intellectual, non-physical union.

Aristophanes attempts to question Socrates on the speech that he is given, but the party is interrupted by the arrival of Alcibiades and a group of drunks. Alcibiades gives a speech praising Socrates but lamenting that despite all of the time they have spent with one another, Socrates has never shown any sexual attraction to him. To Alcibiades' displeasure, Agathon lies down next to Socrates. The party soon dissolves, however, when an even larger group of drunks arrive. Aristodemus falls asleep there and wakes up to find Socrates still awake talking about the art of writing plays. Socrates then leaves, after everyone else has fallen asleep.

## Symposium Analysis

The "Symposium" is less philosophically rigorous than other dialogs and puts more emphasis on the deliverance of fine speeches. However, it is not without philosophical importance, especially Socrates' speech. Socrates identifies love as the guiding force behind philosophy—which is, after all, the love of wisdom—and virtue. One cannot be good or be a philosopher without first having love. However, the love of a philosopher is an evolved kind of love. The most basic form of love is physical, but gradually the philosopher moves beyond that stage and learns to love ideas and concepts instead. This attitude probably explains why Socrates does not appear to be sexually interested in Alcibiades or any of the other young men present.

Another persistent theme in the dialog is the superiority of love between males (always an older man with a younger, pubescent man) over the love between a man and a woman. This appears to be motivated by certain beliefs about the intellectual superiority of men. Two men are smart and wise enough to build virtue with one another, but a woman is incapable of such.

# Republic: Book I

## Republic: Book I Summary

Socrates and Glaucon are returning from a festival when they are accosted by a group of men who insist that they stay to see the later portion of the festival. Socrates agrees and the group goes to one of the men's house where Socrates meets and converses briefly with Cephalus, a rich, old man, about old age, which Cephalus says frees one from the passions of youth. The conversation then shifts to a discussion of the definition of justice, and Cephalus' place is taken by Polemarchus. Polemarchus proposes that justice is doing good to one's friends and evil to one's enemies. Socrates finds this definition insufficient, however, since doing evil to one's enemies would entail making them worse and, therefore, less just, but a just man could not produce an unjust man. Polemarchus concedes this point.

Thrasymachus, who apparently has a very negative view of Socrates' philosophical method, bursts into the scene and rudely offers his own definition of justice. Justice, he says, is the advantage of the stronger, and this is proven by the fact that the rulers of a city, who are the strongest, determine what is just or unjust for their subjects. However, those rules craft the laws for their own interest, therefore, justice is the same as the interest of the strong. Socrates points out that the proper action for rulers is not to look out for their own interests, but for their subjects, much as a physician looks after his patient and not himself. Therefore, Thrasymachus' definition of justice falls apart. Thrasymachus, obviously upset, replies that Socrates is naïve for thinking that no one who practices an art is concerned for his own good, as if a doctor were not concerned to get paid. Socrates quickly destroys this objection, however, by pointing out that the doctor, as a doctor, is only concerned with the health of his patient, and in like manner, a ruler, as a ruler, is only concerned with the prosperity of his subjects. Whatever other intentions he may have as a person are not relevant.

Thrasymachus also asserts that the unjust live better lives than the just, since the unjust, being wise and virtuous, can take advantage of people and situations to their advantage while the just, being too simple-minded, cannot or do not. Socrates takes immediate issue with the claim that the unjust are wise and virtuous and he refutes by showing that in other arts, the one who possesses the art wishes to excel only within the limits of his art—a musician, for example, would not want a skill in playing a harp which went outside of the art of music. The unjust man, however, seeks his own interest even over another unjust man and, by analogy, cannot therefore truly possess wisdom and virtue. Further, once Thrasymachus has admitted that justice is the perfection of the soul, Socrates is able to prove that the just man is happier by demonstrating that a thing performs its proper function through being perfect. The soul's function is to guide a man's life and make him happy, but if the soul is lacking its own perfection, that is, if it is unjust, then a man cannot be happy. Therefore, the just man is happy and the unjust man is unhappy.

# Republic: Book I Analysis

This chapter introduces the central question of "The Republic": What is justice? In typical Socratic fashion, the question is examined initially by considering bad definitions which Socrates quickly refutes. He does not, as of yet, offer a complete definition of his own, but hints that justice is a kind of unity and cooperation of the soul, a theme which is developed in greater detail in later chapters.

Much of Socrates' arguments in these chapters rely on a specific theory and classification of the arts. According to Socrates, each art or trade has its own specific purpose. The art of medicine is aimed at healing the body, the art of sailing is aimed at the safety of the sailors, and so on. Transporting this framework into the discussion of justice, justice is the art of living well. From this, it obviously follows that the man who is truly just is happier than the man who is not at all just, contrary to what Thrasymachus claims.

"The Republic" differs from other dialogs in that it is a dialog that is told by Socrates. In "Meno" or "Crito" Socrates engages directly with the other characters. Here, however, Socrates is recounting conversations he had in the past. One possible reason for this is that it allows Plato more flexibility in describing how the characters are acting. For example, Thrasymachus is described several times as agreeing only reluctantly to what Socrates is saying; in the more typical dialog format, such descriptions would be difficult or impossible.

# Republic: Book II

## Republic: Book II Summary

Glaucon and Adeimantus are not satisfied with Socrates' response to Thrasymachus and offer arguments in favor of the belief that the unjust are better off than the just, though they make it clear that they do not themselves believe that. The only reason people act justly, Glaucon claims, is because they are compelled to; being the victim of injustice is a greater evil than the good that comes from committing an injustice and, therefore, people enter into a kind of contract with one another and make laws prohibiting injustice. However, if a person could get away with committing injustice they would always be willing to do so, proving that no one is just for any reason but the consequences. Furthermore, if one were to consider a thoroughly unjust man and a thoroughly just man, it is obvious that the unjust man would be happier, because part of being unjust is appearing to be just, and therefore he would reap the benefits of a good reputation and also of committing injustice. The just man, on the other, shuns good reputation, preferring instead to act out of virtue, and as such would have the worst reputation and also be deprived of any of the fruits of injustice. It is obvious, in this case, that the unjust man is better off than the just man.

In order to answer these questions—and the larger question of what justice is—Socrates proposes that an analogy be developed. Both individuals and states can be just, and since a state is larger, it might be better to investigate what a just state is and then apply the same principles to know what a just person is. In order to do this, the three men imagine a state, providing for all of the possible needs and luxuries it would require with a detailed division of labor. When they come to the point of requiring soldiers to defend the state, and to take territory from nearby states, Socrates poses the question of what people ought to become soldiers. Since more spirited and soulful animals are always better guardians, it follows that the soldiers should be chosen from among the people who show the most zeal and spirit and, further, they should have philosophical training such that they can properly distinguish friend from enemy.

How exactly these soldiers are educated in philosophy is important, especially how they are educated at a young age, since that is when they are most impressionable. The state must censor literature so that the children who are to become soldiers do not read any kind of fiction which tells lies about the gods, especially those which describe the gods engaging in injustice or deceit.

## Republic: Book II Analysis

In this chapter, the analogy which will serve as the framework for the rest of the dialog is introduced: the just city is taken to be the model for the just soul. Exactly why Socrates thinks that this analogy will be useful is not clear; he simply says that since a city is

large, justice will be more clear in it. However, it is not obvious why justice should be so similar in a city and an individual.

This chapter also introduces the discussion of education, which is a key concern for Socrates as the imaginary republic is constructed. It should always be kept in mind that the city represents the individual, and so it is safe to assume that the lessons about education apply equally to individual development: Being brought up well is essential to being a just man.

# Republic: Book III

## Republic: Book III Summary

Socrates continues to discuss more themes in literature which should be censored to avoid the corruption of the youth. Any passages which depict the afterlife as negative should be expunged as well as any passages which depict men lacking courage or obedience to their superiors or temperance in their desires. The style of literature is important too and the men agree that literature should mainly narrate (that is, describe in the third-person) and only imitate (imitation refers to literature written from the perspective of one of the story's characters) those characters who are virtuous, otherwise the men who read it may want to imitate unjust people. In like manner, the music allowed in the state is to be regulated and only those songs which are conducive to the production of virtuous, spirited men fit for combat will be allowed. A similar argument is extended to censor and regulate the productions of all artists.

Next, Socrates considers the physical education of the soldiers. The soldiers training should make them stronger even than Athenian athletes, he says, because the athletes often lack physical endurance or require inordinate amounts of sleep. The soldiers should also be temperate in their diets and should not become obsessed with a fear of illness, as some are vulnerable to do. Doctors in the city, therefore, should follow closely the philosophy of Asclepius, who gave only simple and quick treatments to patients that came to him, and refused to treat those patients who would require treatments which would take too long, since the treatment would render them useless and it would be better off if they just died instead. Likewise, the republic should have good judges who are virtuous but also trained in spotting evil in order to discourage people from being too eager to sue one another over petty or fictitious claims. Physical training and literary education are both ways of training the soul, Socrates claims; physical training inflames the spirit and makes one more masculine, while literature soothes the spirit and makes one more effeminate. The key to a successful education is to harmonize these two elements and let neither be taken to excess.

The rulers of the city are to be chosen from among those training to be soldiers who appear to love the city the most and who are most resistant to stray from the truth from fear or enticement. In order to make the population accept how its rulers and soldiers are chosen, Socrates suggests that citizen be fed a myth which suggests that all are born in one of three conditions: with bronze and iron souls, with silver souls, or with gold souls. Only those with gold souls may rule and only those with silver souls may serve in the army. The rest are the ordinary citizens who possess the common jobs.

Socrates finally concludes that, in order to prevent the soldiers from becoming tyrants they should live totally separately from the citizens. All of their property should be held in common and they should only be paid enough to live and not allowed to own anything more. In this way, they do not share in the economic excesses of the common men and will not be tempted to use their physical advantage as a means of exploiting them.

# Republic: Book III Analysis

This chapter continues to emphasize the importance of education in the production of good soldiers and rulers for society. Every detail of their upbringing is scrutinized by Socrates and Glaucon, down to the kinds of rhythms that should be allowed in music. Socrates believes that music has a very deep impact on the soul of an individual, so his focus on it is not altogether surprising.

Socrates expresses what might be considered a callous attitude towards the sick. He essentially claims that if a treatment for an illness will take too long, the sick person might as well die, since they will not be productive. However, this attitude does not even apply solely to the working-class, as he relates that Asclepius, a model for Greek doctors, was struck dead for treating a very ill rich man for money. In this case, the question is not of usefulness, since rich men do not have to work for a living, but of virtue. One who spends too much time tending to his body will have a hard time practicing virtue and, therefore, should prefer death. It is curious that virtue is only mentioned in the case of the rich man; this seems to imply that virtue is difficult or impossible for the working-class man to attain, since his worth seems to be measured entirely in productivity.

# Republic: Book IV

## Republic: Book IV Summary

Adeimantus asks Socrates why the city's soldiers, who are responsible for so much, should be deprived of material happiness. Socrates replies that the goal in constructing this imagined republic is not to make one particular class of people happy, but to make a well-organized and perfect society and, therefore, it may require that one class not be as happy as the others. It is necessary that the soldiers not have material possessions of their own, because wealth interferes with one's art, and it would, therefore make them poor soldiers. As such, compared with the "rich" soldiers of other cities, by virtue of their bare lifestyles, they should be able to easily handle two or three times their number.

It is decided that other laws affecting the flow of everyday life can be decided upon by the people themselves and that there is no need to formulate them individually. After adding religious temples to the city, the three, judging that the city is now complete, attempt to see where justice can be found in it. In order to do this, Socrates argues that a perfect city will be wise, courageous, temperate, and just; therefore, if the first three can be discovered in the city, whatever is left over will be justice. The wisdom of the city can be found in those who rule and order it. The courage of the city can be found in the soldiers who defend it and fight for its interests; he defines this courage in them as a resolute adherence to the opinions they learned in their education about what is and is not to be feared. Temperance is defined as the better part of city, or soul, having mastery over the lesser part, and this is found to be in the perfect subjection of the citizens to the rulers. Socrates then concludes, at least provisionally, that justice is the principle according to which each of the citizens exercises only his proper role, and this is the most important virtue of a city, for if a cobbler were to exercise the role of ruler, it would surely spell the destruction of the state.

Returning to the analogy between city and individual, Socrates asks whether the three classes found in the city—the working-class, the soldiers, and the rulers—correspond to anything found in the soul. He concludes that the ruling class corresponds to reason, the soldiers correspond to the passionate aspect of man, and the working-class correspond to man's desires. Therefore, justice consists in the parts of the soul all performing their proper functions, just as in the city.

While the nature of justice has been determined, Socrates must still answer whether justice is preferable to injustice, and in order to do this, he considers the various forms of organization of a soul or city.

## Republic: Book IV Analysis

This dialog answers the fundamental question of what justice is: it is a proper organization of the faculties of the soul such that each part is fulfilling its own proper role

and not usurping the functions of others. In keeping with the structure of the dialog, the role of the faculties of the soul are directly related to the role of three classes of the city. Wisdom is the faculty which ascertains the truth and guides the rest of the soul, just as the rulers legislate for the whole city. A soul is courageous when its passions are able to be kept in check by reason; similarly, a city is courageous when the soldiers show fear or bravery according to their education and the desires of the rulers. Temperance is described as a harmony among the three parts. A temperate soul is one in which all of the parts obey wisdom; a temperate city is one in which all of the classes obey the rulers.

It might be thought that the dialog could very well end here. The initial question which sparked the whole discussion was whether justice was preferable to injustice. After ascertaining what justice is, it seems obvious that justice is the better of the two, for, as Socrates has described, a city in which the classes do not perform their proper tasks is sure to fail. The fact that the discussion does not end here is some reason for thinking that "The Republic" is not only interested in the question of individual justice, but also interested in spelling out a detailed plan for an ideal political organization for its own sake.

# Republic: Book V

## Republic: Book V Summary

Socrates begins to list the four ways in which a state or soul can deviate from justice, but he is interrupted by an objection. Previously, he had claimed that the soldiers should, along with their material possessions, keep their wives and children in common, and that one should never know the identity of one's own offspring. While it was passed over in silence initially, his interlocutors would like to hear a defense of this statement which seems absurd and counter-intuitive.

In response to this, he first discusses the role of women in the ideal republic in general. Women, he says, should be allowed to share in all of the same roles as men, since their different natures do not prevent them from performing any particular task, even though it is admitted that they are generally worse at everything than men.

Next, he passes on to discuss the objection at hand by defining the regulations the state ought to impose on the begetting and raising of children. He proposes a kind of eugenic scheme for the improvement of the state, such that only the best citizens are allowed to breed; furthermore, the rulers, not wanting the state to become either too large or too small, would also regulate how many children are produced each year. In keeping with the principle that each citizen should only perform his specific task and no other, the soldiers (both male and female) will not raise their children, but rather a dedicated group of nurses will look to this. Now, the identity of one's children must be kept secret in order to foster unity among the soldiers. Unity is strongest when people identify common interests and grieve and rejoice over the same things. Since all of the guardians, in a manner, belong to the same family, as their children are all in common, they will be strongly united with one another, since family bonds are the strongest of all bonds. This unity will prevent the soldiers from quarreling with one another or dividing into factions.

The soldiers of this republic will also be forbidden from ever committing any kind of atrocity against fellow Greeks, such as enslavement or the burning of lands. The reason is that all Greeks belong to an extended family and should remain united as much as possible against non-Greeks.

Socrates is taken to task for not explaining how such a city is possible, even if the city is great in many ways. Socrates responds by saying that, since it is a theoretical discussion, it is not a flaw if the political organization of which he speaks is impossible, but he outlines the circumstances which would make the development of such a society most likely by beginning with the most necessary change that would need to made to current states: the rulers must be philosophers. The philosopher, who has knowledge of the truth of things, is distinguished from the common man, who only has opinions. The philosopher is concerned with absolute being and is not concerned so much with contemplating, say, beautiful things, but beauty itself. The man who has opinions, on the

other hand, does not care to consider beauty itself, but rather is concerned only with beautiful things, which fall short of the absolute beauty which they reflect.

## Republic: Book V Analysis

This chapter makes clear that Plato's philosophical ambitions go beyond simply defining the virtue of justice for individuals; he is obviously expressing political views as well. While the content of previous chapters could, and should be, interpreted as metaphorically referring to the individual soul (which is not to say that Plato does not think that his claims apply equally to the state), there would appear to be no parallel for Socrates' recommendations about the role of women in the republic or how the rulers ought to regulate marriage. This is made even more obvious by the lengthy discussion of the possibility of such a society; if the dialog were only interested in providing an analogy for the soul, the difficulties in realizing the ideal city would be irrelevant.

The views on women expressed by Socrates are surprising and radical for his time. Women, he says, should be allowed to have any job that men can hold. The doctrine, however, is less progressive than it might at first seem. It is not based on any notion of equality. Quite the opposite: the reason for the division of labor in the ideal society is that each person should do what he is best at and, therefore, he is only excluded from participating in one trade by virtue of being better at another. Women, however, are worse at almost everything when compared to men and, therefore, could not do better in any other field. They should, therefore, be allowed to practice any trade.

The most important philosophical doctrine in this book is the definition of the philosopher. The philosopher, Socrates argues, is concerned with absolute being—the underlying reality behind the concrete, particular objects of everyday life. He looks beyond these objects and reflects upon the realities which they imitate and reflect. The common man, on the other hand, is ignorant of this absolute reality and concerns himself only with the imperfect objects.

# Republic: Book VI

## Republic: Book VI Summary

Socrates continues to describe the nature of the true philosopher. The philosopher will take great pleasure in knowledge, have a good memory, and be a virtuous person. Before he can continue his account of the philosopher, though, Socrates is interrupted by Adeimantus, who asks why, if philosophers are so virtuous, so many of them turn out to be useless or even positively evil. They are considered useless, Socrates argues, because the average person is unable to perceive their use because of their own blindness to philosophy. The supposedly wicked philosophers are, in fact only imitators, such as the Sophists, who take the opinions of the people and disguise them as philosophy. True philosophers will be hated by the world, but only because they reject the opinion of the many and prefer absolute truth, of which the multitude is ignorant.

Those who are endowed with the character to be philosophers, however, do have a great capacity for doing harm. Individuals who are weak and unintelligent can not accomplish very much good or evil; but the great soul of a philosopher can be used for either great good or great evil. When one with such a soul is growing up, others around him will recognize his great abilities and try to persuade him to serve their own purposes and give up philosophy. These temptations will generally prove too much to resist and, as such, many with philosophical souls will be perverted to doing evil and abandoning philosophy. The philosopher who remains true to his profession is very rare or non-existent, at least under the existing forms of government in Greece.

The philosopher will govern by transforming his city to reflect the absolute truths which he knows; the city will, in other words, become a reflection of perfect justice, perfect beauty, and perfect goodness. It is not so unreasonable to think that this could come about one day, since the son of a king could very well be born with a philosophical soul and then rule the city as a philosopher once he inherits rule.

With the question of the possibility of such a republic coming into existence settled—at least to some degree—Socrates discusses the education of the philosopher. First of all, only the smallest portion of the soldier class will be fit to be trained as philosophers, for the traits which are necessary to be a philosopher—virtue, memory, pleasure in learning, and so on—are only found rarely, even more rarely are they all found in the same person. The potential philosopher must be tested to see if he can endure learning all sorts of knowledge, since the intellectual life of a philosopher is naturally very rigorous.

Now, the ultimate goal of a philosopher is to attain true knowledge of the absolute good. The philosopher does this by first starting out with hypotheses about what the good is and using those like stepping stones to attain the reality itself, for he cannot immediately perceive the absolute truths as they are. Eventually, the hypotheses are left aside and the philosopher can grapple with the ideas themselves.

# Republic: Book VI Analysis

This book of "The Republic" is concerned primarily with discussing practical concerns in actually realizing the kind of society which Socrates has been building in imagination. It is acknowledged among all of them that such a society would be good, but the idea that a society could ever exist in which a philosopher is king seems, at the very least, unlikely, if not impossible. This unlikelihood is based on the perceptions of many people which Socrates, in typical fashion, is not terribly concerned with; the perceptions of the multitudes are usually false and flawed and, besides, are easily changed. If a philosopher ever became a king, they would be so impressed by his ability in ruling that their fickle opinions would quickly change.

This book also provides a clear picture of how exactly a philosopher will rule, and why his rule is so superior to any other form. The philosopher is characterized by his knowledge of the absolute good, the highest of all goods that man can achieve. No one but a philosopher can have this sort of knowledge. The absolute good is the reality which underlies all good things, just as absolute beauty underlies beautiful things. Knowing what the good is, then, the philosopher will be able to transform the society he rules into something which is also good.

Socrates goes to great lengths explaining the way in which a philosopher learns of the good. Since the absolute good is not something which can be seen—it is "intelligible" only and not visible—the philosopher must gradually work his way up to it by beginning with hypotheses about what it might be like. Through discourse and argumentation, these hypotheses will either survive or be refuted. Through this process, he will gradually begin to know about the nature of the good, after which point he will have no need of the hypotheses and can contemplate the idea itself.

# Republic: Book VII

## Republic: Book VII Summary

Socrates provides a metaphor to describe the process of obtaining knowledge of the absolute good. The common man is like one who is imprisoned in a cave and only sees the shadows cast by people and objects moving outside; since this is all that he has seen, he takes these shadows to be the realities himself: He takes the objects he sees everyday to be the ultimate reality. The philosopher, however, is like a man who has been released from his imprisonment and is able to leave the cave and see the objects as they really are, just as he does not focus on the objects of perception but, through philosophy, aspires to know the absolute truths in themselves. In either case, there is a kind of adjustment: one who is accustomed to focus only on sensible objects will be able to understand the intelligible absolute truths only vaguely and, conversely, one who is accustomed to philosophy will only with great difficulty be able to descend again to the level of the sensible and mundane.

For this reason, the philosopher is unwilling to rule. He is accustomed to the realm of absolute being and would not willingly descend back to the realm of the sensible. Therefore, the state must force the philosophers to rule. This is not unjust, however, since the philosopher owes his philosophical life to the state, who educated him and provided for him so that he might rule them.

Socrates and Glaucon then discuss the education of the philosopher as well as of the soldiers The education should benefit both the soldier and philosopher by helping one both in war and by drawing the mind upwards to consider absolute realities. Arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy (or physics) are useful for these purposes, as they are useful for military generals but also ultimately consider the invisible realities which the philosopher contemplates. Dialectic, or the art of reasoning, is the final and greatest study for the philosopher since, unlike the sciences studied so far, it does not rely upon assuming certain hypotheses which it cannot question. It, unlike, geometry, is capable of shedding hypotheses altogether and attaining truth in its essence. The order of their education is important as they must not be introduced to dialectic too early, so that they do not use it to argue themselves out of correct positions as many young people who are familiar with philosophy often do. After studying dialectic (which study should begin at thirty) they will hold a military post so that they may gain some experience and also be tested to see whether they can withstand temptations. After fifteen years of military service, the philosopher will finally be ready to rule the city. After successors have been educated and trained, the philosopher can then leave public service and devote himself entirely to philosophy.

# Republic: Book VII Analysis

In this book, Plato gives an even clearer and more vivid description of how exactly a philosopher attains knowledge with the famous Cave example. To deconstruct the metaphor, Plato's theory of knowledge appears to run thus: the lowest form of thought is that which concerns individual, particular objects of the senses. Even the simplest men are able to gain some understanding about these objects and form some kind of general statements, and these beliefs are called opinions. The third stage of knowledge is reached through the use of sciences which employ hypotheses. Through dialectic, the philosopher tests and refutes a great number of hypotheses about the true nature of being and goodness until, eventually, he begins to understand what being and goodness are in themselves. Once he finally acquires this clear knowledge of being and goodness, he attains the highest and fourth level of knowledge.

Here Plato also lays great emphasis on how exactly the philosopher is to be trained, which is a constant trend throughout "The Republic": education is the key the development of a virtuous, philosophical mind. Thus, while Socrates is speaking directly about the education of philosopher kings for the ideal republic, his statements can be assumed to extend also to the education and development of any individual who wishes to be a philosopher.

# Republic: Book VIII

## Republic: Book VIII Summary

Socrates now returns to the subject of the four disordered forms of government, which correspond to four disordered states of a soul. They are timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny. Starting with the ideal state—which is called aristocracy, or rule by the best—timocracy (rule by the spirited or honorable) develops when the military class becomes mingled with the ruling class. A martial government forms and the state loses its direction from philosophy, but retains many of the virtues of the soldiers; property is still held in common and education proceeds in a similar, but not identical, fashion. This corresponds to the kind of man who lives not by reason, but by honor and passion, which, while imperfect, do not lead him to act altogether unvirtuously.

Oligarchy, rule by the rich, develops when the disorder inherent in timocracy leads men to want to accumulate large sums of money, as they are no longer guided by philosophy. The ruling class, then, becomes those who have a lot of money, while the rest of the state is impoverished. The result is a loss of unity in the state as there are now really two different states with different interests: the rich and the poor, each now vying against the other. Oligarchy corresponds to the greedy man whose life is guided by the accumulation of wealth. Just as the oligarchic state suppresses the poor out of greed, the oligarchic man suppresses most of his desires out of miserliness and is therefore not totally immoral.

Democracy, rule by the poor, arises when the poor, long-oppressed by the minority of the rich who rule in oligarchy, become so unhappy with their condition that they take control of the government either through force or threat of force, which is not a difficult task since the soldiers have become so weak through the poor government of the state under oligarchy. In the democratic state, each man is free to do whatsoever he pleases and there is, as a result, no strong government to compel men to act in any specific way. The democratic man who corresponds to this is one who is led by his every desire and has no sense of virtue, honor, or even of prudence in his affairs.

Tyranny develops out of democracy when the rich, who are leeched off of by the multitudes of the poor, attempt to defend themselves and are then accused of being oligarchs and the enemies of freedom, which is the fundamental principle of democracy. A man then rises up in opposition to these "oligarchs" and promises to rid the city of them if the people give him power, which, swayed by his arguments and charm, readily do. But, once he has taste of this power, he is unwilling to relinquish it and establishes himself as a proper tyrant, at which he point he will actively seek to destroy those who he suspects of being threats to him and will support himself and his government from the sacred treasures of the city and from his father's estate.

# Republic: Book VIII Analysis

This book provides a general overview of the different types of governments and the corresponding states of souls. This book treats very directly of the analogy between the state and the soul as there is seen to be a one-to-one correspondence between all of the good and bad forms of state with good and bad forms of government. It is worth noting that Plato sees the development of all the bad forms of individuals as beginning in childhood, arising out of conflicts with one's father and other influences. Once again, Plato emphasizes the importance of education and early development in the production of good, and bad, men.

Plato also makes his political beliefs very clear here. He obviously prefers the rule of one wise man to the rule of many, as in democracy, which he ranks only above tyranny. Democracy as he conceives it gives the freedom to men to do whatever they please and, he thinks, this amounts more or less to the freedom to engage in vice. Man, therefore, needs to be constrained through authoritarian government in order to be virtuous.

# Republic: Book IX

## Republic: Book IX Summary

The tyrannical man—that is, the man who resembles the tyrannical state—is characterized by a total lack of any check on his desires. While the democratic man is free and liberal in fulfilling his own desires, there are certain deep and perverse desires which he would not conceive of carrying out, such as committing incest or killing one's parents. However, the tyrannical soul has no such limits and will freely do whatever desires come into his mind. The tyrannical man, then, becomes the least free of all types, since he has no power in resisting the desires which present themselves to him and, in carrying out those desires, he also alienates from himself all of society. The tyrant is miserable, but the most miserable of all men is the tyrant who is able to gain control of a state, as he will live in a constant state of fear of being assassinated by those around him. From all that has been said, it is obvious that the philosopher is the happiest of all men, followed by the timocratic man, then by the democratic, and finally by the tyrant, who is the most miserable of all.

The relative happiness of the different states of life can also be seen in what objects each of the three classes desires. The philosopher's pleasure is truth, the soldier's pleasure is honor, and the common man's pleasure is material gain. Now, the philosopher, who is best-equipped to know the truth about things, will be able to determine which of these three pleasures is best; and, since he desires truth, it follows that he does so because he has determined that it is the highest pleasure. Therefore, the life of the philosopher is the most pleasant, followed by the life of the soldier, and then by the common man.

A third proof is also possible. People often think they are experiencing pleasure when they are really just experiencing a ceasing of pain and this is because they are ignorant of what pleasure truly is. In a similar way, simple minds are ignorant of the highest pleasures of knowledge and, as such, mistake the ups and downs of their daily life for true pleasure. Without the guidance of reason, one who is driven by pleasure or honor will often fail to even achieve those goals; but he who possesses reason will know not only to attain the highest good, but will also be most capable of obtaining pleasure and honor. Therefore, the closer one is to the life of reason, the more pleasant will his life be in all areas. The tyrant, then, who is the most disordered of all people, and the furthest from the philosopher, will be the most miserable. The tyrant's life, is in fact, 729 times less pleasant than the philosopher's, according to Socrates' math.

Socrates concludes, then, that the happiest life is the life of the philosopher and, if one is not capable of attaining this by his own abilities, then his life at least should be modeled by a philosopher through the laws of a state.

# Republic: Book IX Analysis

Book IX concludes the argument of "The Republic" by conclusively proving that the just man, the philosopher, is immensely more happy than the unjust man, the tyrant. The basic principle behind all of the arguments in this chapter is a hierarchy among the various goods. Truth is the highest of all goods, followed by honor, and then by pleasure. Correspondingly, one's life is good according to the nobility of the good one seeks. The philosopher, seeking truth, is the best man. The soldier or passionate man who seeks, above all, honor, is deprived of the happiness of the philosopher, and has only a moderate happiness. The man who lives according to desires, is the least happy. Within the men who live according to desire, three types can be distinguished. The highest of the desires are the "productive" or necessary desires, and these the oligarchic man seek. Next are the unnecessary desires, which the democratic man seeks to fulfill. Finally, the tyrant is led by an even lower and more perverse desire. Thus, the tyrant, separated by the greatest distance from the philosopher, is the least happy.

# Republic: Book X

## Republic: Book X Summary

The chief question of the dialog being settled, Socrates refers back to the rules they had proposed at the beginning about poetry. The men had decided that imitative poetry—poetry which speaks from the perspective of a character, and not from the poet—should only be allowed in rare cases, since it is likely to mislead the reader into imitating unvirtuous behavior. Poets and painters are all, in a certain sense, imitators, since they can only represent the appearance of an object which is, itself, only a reflection of a true, underlying reality. Therefore, their competence to speak about issues such as virtue or war are in great question, since they represent these things in a very distant way and it is notable that none of the great poets were ever useful for the purposes of legislating for a city of making men virtuous. It is concluded, then, that these men possessed no real knowledge of the objects of which they wrote, but only reflect what seems to be true to the multitude, who are largely ignorant.

Poetry also tends to appeal to those faculties of a man which most interfere with reason and prevent him from leading a good life. A man who is grieving, if he is good, will attempt to moderate his grief through reason. Since reason is harder to portray and less appealing the masses, the poet will often emphasize the emotions. Thus, in two ways, the poet does harm to the people: first, by giving them false imitations of the truth; second, by riling the passions in them and inclining them to act less by reason. Even good men, to a certain extent, are subject to these dangers. The poet, therefore, ought to be banished from the ideal city.

Socrates then moves on to discuss the rewards of the philosopher after death. In order for the philosopher to be rewarded after death, his soul must survive, and this Socrates proves by showing that injustice, which is the evil of the soul, does not destroy it. However, if an object is not destroyed by its own chief evil, then nothing else could destroy it, not even bodily death, and therefore it must persist after death. The just man, being the friend of the gods, is rewarded by them for the good deeds he accomplished on Earth. Likewise, just men are ultimately rewarded by men, and unjust men are punished.

Socrates concludes the discussion with a myth about the reincarnation of souls. While the philosophers are able to leave their bodies altogether and live with the gods for eternity, the souls of other humans, and even of animals, are reincarnated every thousand years into a body and life of their choosing. The wise will choose lives of virtue and the unwise will choose lives of injustice and even tyranny.

# Republic: Book X Analysis

The final chapter contains several points which it appears Plato wished to expand upon further but for which he could not find the opportunity in the body of the dialog. The first half of this chapter is dedicated to the exile of the poets from the ideal republic, and this can likely be taken in a more general sense. Given his descriptions of the dangers of poetry, it is likely that Plato did think that poets were dangerous to virtue, insidiously exciting the irrational parts of the soul and leading man away from reason. Thus, the poets ought not only to be exiled from the ideal city, but one should also exercise caution around poets in general.

Socrates also argues for a point he makes in other dialogs, including the "Phaedo" which is included in this collection: the immortality of the soul. Here, however, the argument proceeds differently and is arguably a bit more philosophically concise and clear, as "The Republic" is a work that was finished much later than "Phaedo." His argument is metaphysical in nature, arguing that a thing which is not destroyed by its chief evil (injustice in the case of the soul), can be destroyed by nothing else. This is based on a theory of being that each object has its own specific good and evil. The evil of an object being the worst danger it can face, if even it cannot destroy it, then nothing else can.

# The Apology

## The Apology Summary

Socrates is on trial, his accusers have spoken, and he must now make his defense. He notes that his accusers fall into two categories: those who have hated him for a long time and those who have only recently accused him Socrates relates that he has earned a lot of enemies as a result of a mission given to him, indirectly, by the god of Delphi. A friend of his asked the oracle at Delphi whether any man was wiser than Socrates, and the oracle said that there was none. This perplexed Socrates, because he believed that he had no wisdom and sought to verify or refute the oracle by finding men who were renowned for wisdom. However, each supposedly wise man he met actually turned out to not be wise at all, and therefore Socrates realized he was slightly wiser for not pretending to have wisdom. In the process of doing this, those whose reputation of wisdom he undermined came to despise him.

The more recent accusations leveled against Socrates is that he has corrupted the youth and denies Athenian gods; these are the charges for which he is currently on trial. Against the first charge, he argues that no man would willingly corrupt his fellow citizens, since everyone recognizes that to live among good citizens is better than to live among bad citizens. As no one would desire to make life worse for himself, no one would intentionally corrupt the youth. If he corrupted the youth unintentionally, then the law has no relevance. To the second charge, he responds that if he believes in spiritual and divine things, then it follows he believes in the spirits and gods which produce them. Since he does believe in those things, it is obvious that he does not deny the gods, as his accusers claim.

Having responded to his charges, he justifies his way of life by saying that his obedience to the gods takes precedence over any other obligation, even to his society, and that throughout his life he has always done what is right, even if it put his life at risk. Socrates' defense is not typical for the Athenian court; accused often try to gain the sympathy of the court by mentioning their children and wives and pleading for acquittal through tears. However, Socrates thinks that this would do a dishonor to the state, since the role of a judge is simply to determine what is just, and not to be biased through personal sympathy.

The jury finds Socrates guilty and he makes some brief statements about what sentence he ought to be given. While recognizing that the death penalty is possible, he asks instead to pay a sizable fine, relying on the generosity of his friends. However, the jury denies this request and sentences him to death anyway. Socrates takes this gracefully and says that he is sure that death is better than life and that, though his accusers have wished him harm, they have really done a service to him.

# The Apology Analysis

Of all of the dialogs contained in this collection, "The Apology" is perhaps the least philosophical and most biographical. Plato, a student of Socrates, is attempting to portray his teacher and hero as a kind of selfless martyr for the gods and for philosophy and simultaneously portray those who condemned him as foolish and hateful.

The philosophical points contained in this dialog are minimal, and most of the points made here are expressed with more detail and clarity in other dialogs. However, the dominant theme of the dialog is that one must always do what is right, no matter what the cost to oneself is. Socrates, at least as he is portrayed here, is the embodiment of that ideal.

# Crito

## Crito Summary

Socrates is awoken by Crito, who is apparently a wealthy disciple of his. Socrates is imprisoned and set to be executed when a certain boat arrives in town and Crito tells him that the boat is expected today, but Socrates, on the basis of a prophetic dream, believes it will not come until tomorrow. Crito urges Socrates to escape from prison and promises to use his wealth and influence to help him do so. When Socrates resists, Crito points out that it will reflect poorly on himself and his friends because people will think that they did nothing to help Socrates. Socrates rebuffs Crito for caring about the opinion of the masses, noting that even though he is being executed on account of their opinions, they cannot do the worst thing to man, namely, make him unwise and unvirtuous.

After Crito continues to plead with Socrates, Socrates makes an extended argument that fleeing from Athenian law would be an injustice and that, above all, one must never commit an injustice. Even though the sentence against Socrates is unjust, he owes his total obedience to the city because it is like a father to him and all of its citizens. After making this forceful argument, he tells Crito that if he has anything left to say that he should say it, but Crito is speechless.

## Crito Analysis

This dialog is one of Plato's more personal and biographical dialogs. While other dialogs often get directly to the philosophical question at hand—such as "Meno"—"Crito" spends quite a bit of time developing the personal relationship between Socrates and Crito and Crito's desperate pleas for his master to escape and spare his own life are even touching.

Nonetheless, there is certainly a philosophical heart to the dialog, and it is that one owes unswerving, unquestionable obedience to one's city. This is for two reasons. First, the city is responsible for one's birth (indirectly, by sanctioning the marriage of one's parents) and one's upbringing (directly, by providing one's education). The city then assumes a role that is, in some ways, even above one's father; and, as none would disobey his father, the city is especially owed obedience. Second, in the particular case of Athens, one is always free to leave the city if one so desires and so, by staying, one is accepting the laws and authority of the city. This is a kind of primitive form of social contract theory.

# Phaedo

## Phaedo Summary

Phaedo, a man present at the time of Socrates' execution, is asked by Echecrates, whose exact identity is not clear, to give a detailed account of Socrates last hours, which Phaedo readily agrees to do, citing the pleasure remembering Socrates gives to him. Where Phaedo begins his story, he and his fellow admirers of Socrates have just arrived at the prison on the day Socrates is supposed to be put to death. They go into his cell to find him with his wife and his child whom he immediately dismisses upon seeing his disciples.

After explaining that he has begun writing poetry to fulfill a prophetic dream, one of his students brings up the subject of suicide. Since Socrates claims that for the philosopher, death is a good thing, it seems strange that he would think that it is wrong to commit suicide. Socrates explains that while death is a good thing for the philosopher, humans are the property of the gods and, as such, have no right to end their own lives, even if it is good for them. This prompts one of his students to ask why, if he is the property of the gods, would he want to be freed from that ownership by death. If the gods are far wiser and more good than any mortal, it is blessing to be under their control.

Socrates does not disagree that service to the gods is a blessing, but expresses his confidence that he will not be distant from the gods in death. Rather, he expects to have a much more intimate relationship with the gods and with truth in death, since his soul will be freed from his body and the body is a hindrance to the soul's acquisition of knowledge. Only once he is dead will he be able to have true knowledge, and it is for this reason that Socrates, and therefore all philosophers, welcome death.

Cebes, one of his students, raises the concern that death might not result in knowledge, but simply non-existence and nothingness. Socrates responds by pointing that whenever there are two opposites, one always springs from the other. Something cannot be made hot unless it is first cold, for example. Since life and death are opposites, it follows that only a living thing can die (which is obvious) but also that all living things come from dead things and, therefore, that souls exist beyond death, because they are what later become living things again. Cebes notes that this also supports Socrates' doctrine that all learning is remembering truths perceived before one was born into a physical body. Simmias, another student, asks for the reason for believing this doctrine. Cebes offers him an initial proof by pointing out that people can be induced to discover truth they were not taught in this life through questioning, showing that they acquired that knowledge before this life. Socrates offers an additional proof: in the world objects imperfectly reflect certain concepts such as goodness and equality and men are aware of the concepts which they reflect. This suggests that men are already somehow familiar with these concepts and, since they could not have been acquired on earth, they must have been acquired before birth. Cebes is not fully satisfied with this answer, as it proves only that the soul existed before birth, and not

that it exists after death. Socrates acknowledges this and offers as proof of the soul's continued existence the fact that the soul, being immaterial and invisible, is also unchanging and indivisible (like all other immaterial and invisible things) and therefore cannot be destroyed or changed after death. Further, everyone acknowledges that the soul is greater than the body, but the body in some cases exists for enormous periods of time after death; so too, then, must the soul continue to exist.

Hesitant to bring up doubts about Socrates argument, for fear of upsetting him, Simmias and Cebes finally admit that they both have objections. Simmias points out that many conceive of the soul as a kind of harmony among the parts of the body: While it is immaterial and invisible, it is dependent upon the operations of the matter. When the matter is no longer properly organized, the harmony disappears and the soul is no more. Before Socrates responds to this, he asks Cebes for his objection. Cebes says that the fact that the soul is greater than the body does not imply that the soul lasts longer than any particular, but that it lasts longer in general; thus, the soul may be strong enough to persist over several bodies, but not strong enough to persist over an unlimited number. The gathered students are dismayed by these objections as they seem too strong to be overcome. Before answering them, Socrates exhorts Phaedo, and the rest of the students, to not be discouraged by finding arguments to be faulty. Some thinkers, after seeing argument after argument disproved, conclude that no argument is true and that philosophy is a waste of time; this attitude most be totally avoided.

Socrates deals quickly with Simmias' argument. Since both Cebes and Simmias have already accepted that the soul exists before birth, it is obvious that any notion of the soul as a harmony cannot be accepted, since a harmony cannot pre-exist the components which create it. He also points out that a harmony is totally dependent upon and the material components which create it, but the soul is characterized by the fact that it often corrects and even contradicts the body, for example, by restraining its passions.

In order to respond to Cebes' objection, Socrates must develop a general theory of properties in which he claims that for every property, there is something else which gives it that property which, itself, always possesses that property. For example, hotness is always hot and it is what makes other things hot. In like manner, the soul is what gives life to things and, as such, it is always itself alive and, therefore, immortal.

After thus settling the argument, Socrates relates a myth about the fate of souls after death. After giving a detailed description about the geography of the earth and underworld, Socrates says that all souls are judged according to their deeds during life. Those souls which were neither good nor bad are punished and cleansed of whatever bad deeds they did and then rewarded for their good deeds. Other souls, who did evil but entirely unforgivable deeds are punished more severely but eventually are released from that punishment and allowed to enjoy the rewards of the good. Other souls, still, have committed such evil acts that they are punished forever and never enjoy any reward. Finally, those souls which have lived good and honorable lives are allowed to

enter into a heaven-like state where they contemplate the truth directly, freed from their bodies.

Socrates then requests that his poison be brought to him and drinks it. His students are overwhelmed with grief, not so much for Socrates, but for their loss of such a great teacher. He asks them to calm themselves as a man should die in peace. Immediately before dying, he tells Crito that he owes a man named Asclepius a rooster and asks Crito to make sure the debt is paid.

## Phaedo Analysis

This dialog is notable both for its non-philosophical and philosophical themes. In a similar vein as "Crito" and "The Apology," the personality of Socrates is developed. In particular, he is portrayed as a hero and father figure to the young group of students that has gathered around him. This is closely related to the second theme which appears throughout the dialog: Socrates is earnestly trying to convince his students to take up lives of philosophy after he is gone. This is perhaps why Socrates offers arguments which he later accepts are flawed; he is not so much interested in correct arguments at this time, but in instilling the philosophical way of thinking in his disciples.

Philosophically, the primary question discussed in the dialog is the immortality of the soul. Socrates attempts to prove this in several ways and, in the course of so doing, develops a theory of properties. According to this theory, any object that has a certain property, such as beauty, is beautiful because it possesses or participates in beauty. Beauty itself, says Socrates, is beautiful, but it differs from beautiful objects in that it can never not be beautiful, whereas a beautiful object could become ugly. In the case of life, what makes a thing living is a soul. In a similar way to beauty, then, the soul can never not be living, even if the objects that participate in its "living-ness" can.

# Characters

## Socratesappears in Ion, Meno, Symposium, The Republic, The Apology, Crito, Phae

Socrates is the main character in all of the dialogs included in this collection. He is, above all, a philosopher, and he seems to have no interest in any other pursuit. In several of the dialogs, he indicates that he has very few material possessions on account of his profession (he says this, for example, in "The Apology" and it is implied in "Phaedo"). His dedication to philosophy has also gotten him into a fair amount of trouble, as he indicates in "The Apology" that he would have been executed by a group of tyrants for not obeying their orders.

His dedication to philosophy is also the reason for his eventual execution. He is charged with corrupting the youth and denying the Athenian gods; both charges are directly related to this life as a philosopher. As many of the dialogs indicate, a group of young men have gathered around Socrates hoping to learn of his wisdom and of his philosophical method. As Socrates suggests at the end of "The Apology", these followers of his, after his death, will go on to cause the same "trouble" that he has. It is not improbable to think that they are already doing so and that this is precisely what his accusers refer to in charging him with corrupting the youth. Socrates also has unorthodox religious beliefs, which is presumably the substance of the second charge. In "The Republic," for example, he explicitly rejects many of the traditional myths about the gods and even bans them from the hypothetical society they are constructing.

Socrates credits the gods with his steadfast dedication to philosophy. In "The Apology," he claims that a friend of his asked the oracle at Delphi whether any man were wiser than Socrates and the oracle replied that there was none. Socrates, perplexed by this as he believed that he knew nothing, sought out all of the men with a reputation for wisdom and, one by one, discovered that their wisdom was nothing but an appearance. Socrates then understood that the wisdom which the oracle referred to was his admission that he knew nothing, which put him at an advantage over those who claimed to know much but really knew nothing. Socrates then re-interprets the message as mission to examine and judge whether anyone on earth really does have wisdom. In several other places, Socrates makes reference to a special relationship with the divine, as exemplified in the prophetic dream in "Crito" and the warnings and orders he claims to receive from the gods in "Phaedo."

To what extent the Socrates of Plato's dialogs is historical is unclear. In many of the dialogs, his role is more or less simply to question and answer and in such cases it is not unreasonable to think that he is being used as a character and is not necessarily meant to have actually said and done the things contained in the dialogs. However, in "Crito," "Phaedo," and "The Apology" Plato is clearly depicting Socrates at a specific point in his life and, whether or not Plato is embellishing or distorting the truth, the depiction is certainly meant to be of Socrates' actual life.

## Cephalusappears in The Republic

Cephalus is an old, rich man in whose house "The Republic" takes place. He and Socrates engage briefly about the benefits and hardships of old age, and Cephalus suggests, to Socrates' delight, that old age is a blessing, since it frees a man from the uncontrollable passions of his youth. After this discussion, however, Cephalus leaves the room and does not return.

## Polemarchusappears in The Republic

Polemarchus is Cephalus' father and a member of the audience for "The Republic." After Cephalus and Socrates have talked briefly, Polemarchus suggests that justice is doing good to one's friend and evil to one's enemy, a definition which Socrates quickly tears apart. Polemarchus' passivity in the argument is the reason for Thrasymachus' forceful entry into the conversation.

## Thrasymachusappears in The Republic

Thrasymachus is a member of the discussion at Cephalus' house in "The Republic" and seems to be particularly averse to Socrates and his philosophical method, as is made clear by his rude attitude and the various insults he throws out. Thrasymachus, while debating Socrates, asks for payment before making his arguments (which he never receives) and this is perhaps to identify him with a despised group of philosophers named the Sophists, who Socrates condemns later in the same dialog as well as in the "Meno."

Thrasymachus enters into the conversation with an objection against Socrates' discussion of justice in the first chapter of "The Republic." Socrates has been arguing that justice is better than injustice, and Thrasymachus interjects by claiming that justice is simply a tool that the strong (namely, law-makers) use to exploit the weak (citizens). He goes further and claims that the unjust live better because they can exploit the just, who are too simple-minded to retaliate. Thrasymachus can then be taken to represent a kind of "might is right" view of justice, which Socrates dissects and ultimately refutes. Thrasymachus appears to stick around for the rest of the dialog, but stays, for the most part, silent.

## Adeimantus and Glauconappears in The Republic

Adeimantus and Glaucon are two brothers who serve as Socrates' primary interlocutors during "The Republic." While much of their presence in the dialog consists of being "yes-men" to Socrates, they do, at various times, raise objections to points Socrates has made. Most notably, the pair raise what Socrates considers to be two very serious objections to his theory of justice at the beginning of Book II.

## Menoappears in Meno

Meno is a professional philosopher who is Socrates' philosophical adversary in the dialog named after him. Meno is taken to represent the position of Gorgias, a Sophist. Meno attempts to define virtue by listing various virtues for people in various states of life, but Socrates finds this insufficient and proceeds to take Meno on an investigation of what virtue itself is.

## Agathonappears in Symposium

Agathon is the host of the dinner party that is the setting for "Symposium." He chides the other speakers for not praising the god of love, but simply the benefits of love. Agathon appears to be attracted to Socrates.

## Phaedrusappears in Symposium

Phaedrus is the first speaker in the "Symposium" and it is evidently due to him that Agathon chooses love as the topic for discussion. Phaedrus praises Love as one of the oldest gods and claims that love is a powerful force for giving a man courage, who would not want his beloved to think he is a coward.

## Pausaniasappears in Symposium

Pausanias is a legal scholar who speaks second after Phaedrus in the "Symposium." Pausanias criticizes Phaedrus' speech for not distinguishing between the two types of love. The first and inferior type is that love which is equally for a woman or for a man. The second type, the best kind, is that love which is shared between an older man and a younger, but pubescent boy. These relationships, he claims, are beneficial to both and help in building virtue. In keeping with his profession, Pausanias provides a fairly detailed analysis of the legal status of such relationships in Athens.

## Eryximachusappears in Symposium

Eryximachus is a doctor present in "The Symposium" who treats of the subject of love by making an analogy to his own trade. The body, he claims, has within it two loves, the love of health and the love of disease. The role of the doctor is to encourage the first and discourage the second and thus bring about health. This general pattern extends to other arts, too, where there is a duality of a good and bad love.

## Aristophanesappears in Symposium

Aristophanes is a playwright present at Agathon's dinner party in the "Symposium" and, when it is his turn to deliver a speech, creates what he himself acknowledges is a

ridiculous myth about the origin of love. According to this myth, humans were originally spheres who rolled around the earth but were split in half when they angered the gods. Love is the impulse which seeks out one's missing half.

## Alcibiadesappears in Symposium

Alcibiades arrives late and drunk to the "Symposium" and has very little to say on the topic of love in general. However, he has much to say in praise of Socrates and evidently has a romantic interest in him which, to his frustration, is not returned.

## Meletusappears in The Apology

Meletus is Socrates' chief accuser in "The Apology" and blames Socrates for corrupting the youth and denying the existence of any gods. He is the only other person to speak in the dialog, when Socrates is directly questioning him during his defense.

## Ionappears in Ion

Ion is a famous and capable reciter of the Greek poet Homer whom Socrates encounters after he has just won a recital contest. Socrates argues to him that the reciting of poetry is not an art, but a gift from the gods.

# Objects/Places

## Philosophyappears in Ion, Meno, Symposium, The Republic, The Apology, Crito, Phae

Philosophy is, according to Plato, the highest of all studies. Philosophy investigates the realities of which everyday objects are only a pale reflection. For example, beautiful objects all share a common property of "beauty" which has a reality of its own and is independent of any beautiful object. This abstract and invisible beauty can only be understood through reason, and understanding such realities is the role of the philosopher.

## Timocracyappears in The Republic

Timocracy, or government by honor or spirit, is, according to Socrates, the second best form of government after rule by philosophers. Timocracy is basically military rule, in which the philosophers have been displaced by those who are considered most honorable. It is fundamentally flawed since reason is no longer the ruling principle, but still maintains some good.

## Oligarchyappears in The Republic

Oligarchy is a degenerate form of government which follows after timocracy. In an oligarchy, those who have amassed the most wealth rule and greed is the law of the land.

## Democracyappears in The Republic

Democracy is rule by the poor. It is characterized by total freedom in which any individual is free to do whatever he pleases and is described by Socrates as basically being lawless and anarchic.

## Tyrannyappears in The Republic

Tyranny is the worst form of government, in which a unjust individual is able to convince the people that he will serve and protect them but, once he has achieved power, works only for his own interest no matter what the costs are to his subjects. The tyrant, necessarily paranoid about those close to him, lives in constant fear and anxiety. He is the most miserable of all men.

## Justiceappears in The Republic

Justice is defined by Socrates in "The Republic" as the proper ordering of the soul such that each faculty is performing only its own function. The three faculties of the soul are reason, which guides and orders the rest of the soul, the passions, which inspire the soul to fight when necessary, and the desires, which lead the soul to provide for its necessities. A soul is just when reason reigns over all of these faculties.

## Temperanceappears in The Republic

Temperance is one of the chief virtues of a good person. It consists in moderating and restraining one's desires in line with reason.

## Courageappears in The Republic

Courage is a virtue of a person who faces danger appropriately. A courageous person should not be confused with a reckless person, who never runs or avoids conflict. Rather, a courageous person knows when to fight and when to run.

## Wisdomappears in The Republic, Meno

Wisdom is the highest of all virtues since it guides all of the rest. The wise soul knows what absolute goodness is and attempts to realize that goodness in his soul.

## The Sophistsappears in The Republic, Meno, The Apology

Sophists are, Socrates argues, imitators of philosophy who, instead of attempting to understand the truth, simply say what the masses will find pleasant and reasonable. They are characterized particularly by the fact that they charge students for their services.

## Gyges' Ringappears in The Republic

Gyges' ring is a hypothetical magical ring which Glaucon and Adeimantus mention in an attempt to show that people only act justly in order to avoid punishment. Gyges' ring is supposed to make its wearer invisible at will and Gyges, the owner of the ring, used it to steal and commit adultery. The two brothers suppose that anyone with such a ring would do so and, therefore, only refrain from injustice out of fear.

# Themes

## The Importance of Education

A dominant theme of "The Republic" is the necessity of educating the soldiers and rulers of the city well. As much of the education of very young children takes place through the reading and telling of stories, Socrates suggests that the poems they read be heavily censored to ensure that their content is in line with the truth. For example, any stories portraying the gods acting immorally should be banned, as the gods should be given as models of virtue. Likewise, virtuous men should never be portrayed as being subject to too much sorrow or weeping, since these are not qualities that soldiers should want to imitate. The effect of music on the soul is also considered very profound and, likewise, should be heavily monitored. Physical training is important to counteract the "feminizing" effects of too much study.

The curriculum for the philosopher is laid out in great detail. As the philosopher is initially trained in common with the soldiers, beginning courses are taken in mathematics and astronomy (which, on Socrates' account, is closer to physics). For the man (or woman) who will grow up to be a soldier, these sciences will be of use in planning strategies in battles. For the philosopher, they will be useful by leading the mind to think of the absolute realities which underlie them. After these studies, the philosopher-to-be will study dialectic, the art of reasoning, for five years before entering into the military in order to gain experience and to prove that he can withstand temptations. Finally, at the age of fifty, the philosopher should be fully formed and ready to rule.

## Reason as Ruler

Several times in the dialogs, Socrates describes reason, or the rational soul, as the ruling force of the whole person. Reason is the means by which people know the truth and knowledge is necessary to act correctly, in two ways. First, it is obvious that to achieve any goal, one must have knowledge of what is necessary to do so; otherwise, one might make a mistake and fail. Second, and more importantly, reason determines which goals are worth seeking. A person who is deficient in their ability to reason might think that pleasure or honor are the highest goods and therefore direct all of their energies to obtaining them. The truly wise and reasonable man, however, realizes that truth is above all the most important good. Thus, the man who is ruled by reason is doubly happy: Not only does he seek what is truly good, he is able to obtain all of the goods in greater quantity than anyone else.

The "rule" of reason is taken literally in the case of the ideal state. The philosopher embodies reason and is the only member of the entire republic who has true knowledge of the absolute good. As a result, he is able to order the state—much as a wise person orders his own soul—to conform with that idea of the good.

# Philosophy as the Most Worthy Profession

The nobility of the philosophical life is emphasized in several of the dialogs. The nobility of the philosophical life is obvious in "The Republic" where the philosopher, being the wisest of all citizens, rules the city. In fact, so noble is the philosophical life that the philosophers must actually be coerced to rule, since they much prefer to spend their time contemplating truths. The philosopher is also the happiest of all men, since his pleasure—truth—is the greatest of all pleasures.

Socrates himself embodies the nobility of philosophy, since he prefers its pursuit to anything else. In "Phaedo," "The Apology," and "Crito" he indicates that he has very little money since he has preferred to engage in philosophy rather than pursue any more profitable career. This is because he believes that wisdom is a far greater treasure than any material good and, as such, he is happy to trade property for truth and virtue.

In "Phaedo" Socrates spends much of his time exhorting his disciples to continue in the philosophical life even after he is dead. He recommends it several times and the discussions they have can be seen being as much practice for future philosophical investigations as they are real attempts to find the truth, as Socrates advances arguments which, upon further inspection, turn out be false. The importance, it seems, is the method and not so much the result.

# Style

## Point of View

All of Plato's writings contained in this collection are written in dialog format, but there is significant difference in the exact form. In some dialogs, the form is very direct and straightforward. For example, in "Meno" the story is just an "objective" account of a conversation had by Meno and Socrates. In other dialogs, there is a degree of separation between the story being told and the actual events. This can be seen in "Phaedo," where, instead of relating the events of Socrates' death directly, Plato chooses to have Phaedo, a witness to the events, give an account of them at a later date. One possible reason for this is that it allows Plato to frame the events in a context sympathetic to Socrates, since Phaedo prefaces the account by saying how happy he is to recall Socrates.

"The Republic" is told in this indirect fashion by Socrates. The reason for this might be slightly different, since "The Republic" is not at all personal or biographical. Rather, it allows Plato to better characterize how the arguments are flowing. For example, Thrasymachus is often said to only reluctantly accept conclusions reached by Socrates; in a more direct format, this kind of description would not be possible.

"Symposium" is narrated even more remotely. Apollodorus relates the events of a dinner party that happened many years ago to Phoenix. Apollodorus himself was not there, however, and is simply re-telling the account given to him by Aristodemus. A possible reason for this separation is to give Plato slightly more freedom in telling the story, since the reader might be inclined to think that Socrates' behavior is not necessarily representative, since it is, after all, a third-hand account.

## Setting

The settings of the dialogs are often vague and mentioned only once at the beginning. It is easy for the reader to forget that "The Republic" takes place in Polemarchus' house, as this fact is mentioned once in the beginning and never referred to again. In "Ion" and "Meno" where the conversation takes place is never even mentioned, though they presumably take place somewhere in public.

Setting is more relevant in "Symposium" as it is important to the story that the speakers are gathered at a dinner party. The setting is casual and so is the philosophy; "Symposium" is more entertaining and less rigorous than any of the other dialogs, as it consists of characters giving off-the-cuff speeches about the virtues of love. Aristophanes tells an admittedly absurd myth about the origin of love. If this were understood to take place in a more typical argumentative context, it might be confusing why such strange stories were exchanged. However, in the context of a casual, friendly dinner party, the stories make much more sense.

The importance of the settings for "Phaedo," "Crito," and "The Apology" is obvious, as they are as much biographical texts as they are philosophical, relating Socrates struggle with the laws of Athens and his final hours.

## Language and Meaning

W.D. Rouse has attempted to make this translation of Plato's dialogs accessible and clear to modern readers and uses simple words wherever possible. This has the obvious advantage of making the text easy to read, but some readers may find this excessive when anachronistic or simply awkward phrases are used. For example, in the opening pages of Ion (p. 16) Ion says: "When someone speaks about any other poet, I can't attend. I can't put in one single remark to the point, I'm just in a doze—but only mention Homer and I'm wide awake in a jiffy, and I attend, and I have plenty to say!" Many readers may find the use of such modern, slang language as "jiffy" to be out of place and distracting.

Plato himself tries to use language consistently and uniformly throughout any given dialog. Thus, for example, exactly one use is word to denote justice, another word for virtue, and so on. This facilitates consistent, sound philosophical argument as there is no danger of words being confused.

## Structure

This book is a collection of independently-written dialogs so there is not a particular structure to the whole work. Most of the dialogs—"Ion," "Meno," "Crito," "Phaedo," and "The Apology"—are unbroken conversations between Socrates and one or more interlocutors.

The structure of "Symposium" is of some significance. After everyone has been gathered for the dinner, those present at the party take turns reciting speeches in honor of the god of love. There is some degree of progression over the course of the speeches. Pausanias criticizes the speech given by Phaedrus, and the ideas expressed by Pausanias are built upon by Eryximachus. However, the most important function of the structure is to allow Socrates' speech to be the culminating point of the party. Coming last, it is natural to take his understand of love as authoritative, since no one comes after him to correct him. In fact, Aristophanes is even about to question Socrates on some part of his speech, but is interrupted by Alcibiades before he can do so.

The division of "The Republic" into ten books is of mixed significance since Plato himself did not divide the work. The divisions were introduced by a later interpreter. However, the books do still represent somewhat isolated themes. Book I is an introduction to the question of justice and starts the conversation off by giving two faulty definitions of justice. Book II introduces the analogy between the city and soul after showing that the difficulties in believing that justice is better than injustice are deeper than originally thought. Book III discusses how the citizens are to be educated, a dominant theme throughout the dialog. Book IV discusses the manner in which the

soldiers and rulers are to live and concludes with a satisfactory definition of justice. Book V returns to difficulties raised previously in the discussion regarding the role of women and children in the ideal state and introduces the idea that philosophers are to rule the city. Book VI expands upon this latter idea, explaining exactly what the nature of a philosopher is and the traits which he must have. Book VII continues the discussion on philosophers, and of the acquisition of truth in general. Book VIII compares the just society with deficient forms of governments. Book IX is really the conclusion of the dialog, as in it Socrates definitively proves that justice is preferable to injustice. In book X, certain issues which were introduced previously but could not be discussed are handled.

# Quotes

"But if, as I believe, you have no art, but speak all these beautiful words about Homer unconsciously under his inspiring influence, then I acquit you of dishonesty, and shall only say that you are inspired." (Ion, p. 27)

"And I myself, Meno, living as I do in this region of poverty, am as poor as the rest of the world; and I confess with shame that I know literally nothing about virtue." (Meno, p. 29)

"Wealth, I said, and poverty; the one is the parent of luxury and indolence, and the other of meanness and viciousness, and both of discontent." (Republic IV, p. 219)

"The direction in which education starts a man, will determine his future life." (Republic IV, p. 222)

"The soul of man is immortal and imperishable." (Republic X, p. 418)

"Wherefore, O judges, be of good cheer about death, and know this of a truth—that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. He and his are not neglected by the gods; nor has my own approaching end happened by mere chance. But I see clearly that to die and be released was better for me; and therefore the oracle gave no sign. For which reason also, I am not angry with my accusers, or my condemners; they have done me no harm, although neither of them meant to do me any good; and for this I may gently blame them." (The Apology, p. 446)

"The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways—I to die, and you to live. Which is better God only knows." (The Apology, p. 446)

"My dear Criton, I only wish the many could do the greatest mischief, so that they could also do the greatest good!" (Crito, p. 449)

"My way is and always has been to obey no one and nothing, except the reasoning which seems to me best when I draw my conclusions." (Crito, p. 450)

"So, Simmias, our souls existed long ago, before they were in human shape, apart from bodies, and then had wisdom." (Phaedo, p. 480)

"But you, if you please, do not be anxious about Socrates, not a bit, but but be very anxious about truth; if you think I say anything true, agree with me, and if not, oppose me with all your might, that my eagerness many not deceive both myself and you—I don't want to be like a bee and leave my sting in you when I go." (Phaedo, p. 495)

"To use ugly words not only is out of tune with the event, but it even infects the soul with something evil." (Phaedo, p. 519)

# Topics for Discussion

Why does Socrates object when Meno, trying to define virtue, gives a list of virtues?

What is Socrates' reasoning for allowing women to hold any role in the ideal republic?

What is the greatest form of love, according to Socrates' speech in "Symposium?"

In "Crito," why does Socrates claim that obedience is owed to the state, even if it is wrong?

What, according to Thrasymachus in "The Republic," is the definition of justice?

Summarize the arguments given for the immortality of the soul in "The Republic" and "Phaedo." Which, if any, are convincing?

Why does Socrates believe that the philosophers must be forced to rule in the ideal republic?

Why does Socrates claim that so many people hate him in "The Apology"?

In "Meno," what does Socrates conclude that virtue is?

What is the meaning of the cave metaphor in the Republic VII?