

**Mark L. McPherran**, ed.

*Plato's Republic: A Critical Guide.*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010.

288 pages

US\$85.00 (cloth ISBN 978-0-521-49190-7)

Plato lovers will rejoice at this new Cambridge collection of critical essays on Plato's *Republic*. Edited by Mark McPherran, this volume features new analyses of pivotal questions about justice, music, poetics, art, dialogical structure and metaphysics/epistemology, by a full cast of the superstars of Platonic studies. Julia Annas, G. R. F. Ferrari, Christopher Shields, Hugh Benson, C. D. C. Reeve name but a few of the top scholars whose work appears in this fine collection.

McPherran's introductory chapter sets the course for this scholarly journey, charting a revelatory *katabasis* into the depths of Plato's magnum opus, rightly celebrated as the ancient philosopher's central text and a fixture of the canon across a broad multi-disciplinary field, from philosophy to political theory, to psychology, classics, religious studies, educational theory and classics. One might wonder what remains to be said about this old tome after millennia of 'footnotes to Plato'. However, this critical guide proceeds to serve up a delicious intellectual feast with plenty of new delights on the menu. Old topics are given new interpretations; new questions are raised that seemed long settled. There is something for every serious student of the old master in this new reader.

Some of the questions raised anew include: Does Plato succeed in his argument that the just life is the most attractive? Is the tripartite model of the soul coherent and plausible? What is the epistemology/metaphysics of the dialogue and the merits and pitfalls of these? Does the compulsory governance duty assigned the philosopher-kings against their deepest desire (the contemplative life) constitute an injustice to the philosophers by requiring them to a life worse than they would choose for themselves?

Highlights of this critical guide include Ferrari's painstaking analysis of Plato's dialogical governance style. In this essay, 'Socrates in the *Republic*', Ferrari challenges the traditional interpretation of Socrates as a thinker who holds fast in his intellectual grip his conversation with every interlocutor, herding them toward their inevitable fate at the old philosopher's mercy. Instead, Ferrari marks out the argument of the *Republic* as a dialogue where Socrates is himself held in check, as Plato, not Socrates, takes charge of the flow of the dialogue, tightening and releasing his hold accordingly as he directs the course of its narrative. This new lens reveals a different Socrates from the self-confident ironic trickster he is often supposed, and brings into relief a more helpless Socrates, buffeted about by the sudden surprises of the dialogue, tossed on the waves of its arguments, and beset by the unexpected demands of his interlocutors. This reading not only collapses the traditional view of the classical icon but also collapses the contrast that is traditionally drawn between the early 'Socratic/aporetic' dialogues and the later doctrinal 'Platonic' dialogues.

Another stimulating highlight of this collection is C. D. C. Reeve's 'Blindness and Reorientation', an essay on education in the *Republic*. The dialogue devotes more of its pages to the topic of education than to any other topic, so Reeve re-explores the dialogue's *kallipolis* as a model for an educational institution, inquiring into the specific tasks that such a school might include in its educational program. Reeve argues that Plato's views on education offer insight into every aspect of the ancient philosopher's thought, since education in this dialogue is framed as a 'turning of the soul' which is revealed to have multiple aspects—reason, passions and appetites. The turning of the rational element cannot be accomplished without a reorientation of the whole soul, which implies that a full psychological reorientation is necessary to the task of proper education, and that the many diverse aspects of the whole human person must be taken into account when designing an appropriate educational plan. Thus the *Republic* is shown to comprise an enlightened educational blueprint that puts to shame most modern institutions, with their strict focus on the accumulation of mere knowledge; the model for true and proper education that Reeve locates in the *Republic* turns the soul of the learner not only in the direction of rational wisdom, but courage, temperance, and justice. This educational epistemology thus contains the blueprint as well for Plato's psychology and metaphysics.

A third noteworthy highpoint of the volume is Malcolm Schofield's essay rethinking Plato's views on the arts, 'Music all pow'rful'. In this article, Schofield focuses on key passages in Book 3 of the *Republic* that highlight the importance of music for fostering appropriate responses to beauty, as well as for cultivating the love of philosophy. Music is revealed as a critical pedagogical resource for moral education, Schofield argues, since it has the capacity to shape the soul by assimilation into a harmony of virtues. Schofield shows how the *Republic*'s discourse on music maps the logic of the soul's harmony and then extends that logic into the tuneful accord of the community *in toto*, which 'cultural agenda' (the critical importance of music to the health of the whole community) will later be brought to completion in the *Laws*.

This volume, part of the Cambridge Critical Guide Series, is not intended for the novice reader but for veteran Plato scholars who crave a more detailed critical journey into the classical text. It is an outstanding work, with essay after essay offering new food for Platonic thought. It is suitable for graduate students of ancient philosophy, psychology or political theory and will be a thorough delight for the seasoned scholar. Bravo, Cambridge and editor McPherran! Kudos as well to contributors Rachel Barney, Rachana Kamtekar, Nicholas Smith, Zena Hitz, and J. H. Lesher.

**Wendy Hamblet**  
Adelphi University