Plato's *Republic*

An Introduction

SEAN McALEER

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9. The Philosopher's Virtues
Book VI

Although there are serious problems with the Powers Argument, its invalidity and unsoundness do not entail that the ideal city will get washed away by the Third Wave. For even if we reject the mind-independent reality of the Forms or, more cautiously, regard belief in their mind-independence as unjustified, we can still agree with Plato that ideal rulers will possess knowledge of what is best for the city. Although the distinction between knowledge and belief is crucial to Plato's distinction between philosopher and non-philosopher, knowledge and belief can be different epistemic states even if they do not have different objects. So the distinction between knowledge and belief, and the distinction between philosopher and non-philosopher that it underlies, can survive the failures of the Powers Argument, since the distinction itself does not depend on Plato's particular way of making it.

In this chapter, we will look at another way in which Plato tries to distinguish between 'a true philosopher and [...] a counterfeit one' (6.485d). He is especially keen to distinguish genuine philosophers from sophists, the professional teachers of rhetoric whom the public mistakenly takes to be philosophers. In doing so, Plato will not only shore up his response to the Third Wave by further 'defin[ing] who the philosophers are that we dare to say must rule' (5.474b), but he will also exonerate Socrates, who, as many readers know, was tried and convicted of impiety and corrupting the youth of Athens and put to death for those alleged crimes in BCE 399. Sophists, and not philosophers, Plato insists, are guilty of corrupting the youth (6.492a). In a phrase that will recall

his Book I exchange with Thrasymachus, Socrates wants to discover who the philosophers are 'in the most exact sense of the term' (6.503b).

In asking 'whether a soul is philosophic or not' (6.486b), Plato indicates that being a philosopher is a matter of nature as well as nurture. All the education and nurture in the world will not produce a philosopher if the underlying philosophic nature is not present, and improperly educating someone with a philosophic nature will not just fail to produce a philosopher, it is likely to produce moral depravity: 'the best natures become outstandingly bad when they receive a bad upbringing' (6.491e). Those who naturally possess the intellectual wherewithal to be philosophers but who do not receive the right kind of education can do far more harm than their less intellectually endowed fellows. Plato seems to have in mind here the historical Alcibiades, a beautiful, brilliant young Athenian who proved a traitor, switching sides to Sparta in the Peloponnesian War. Fans of the television drama *Breaking Bad* will not be far off the mark in taking Walter White as an example of Plato's point, since his intellectual prowess makes him far worse, morally, than his partner and former student, Jesse.

Socrates' task is to describe the philosophic nature, to show what philosophers are like in contrast with non-philosophers. In Book VII he will discuss their nurture, expanding on the program of education already spelled out in Books II and III. In Book V the distinction between philosopher and non-philosopher rested on the distinction between knowledge and belief, which led us to the metaphysical distinction between Forms and particulars. Here the focus is on the virtues that true philosophers can and do possess.

Loving the Truth

The most important of these virtues is love for the truth. Not only must philosophers 'be without falsehood, they must refuse to accept what is false, hate it, and have a love for the truth' (6.485c). This will strike many readers as surprising in light of Socrates' earlier insistence that the rulers will have to employ falsehood in governing, for example in rigging the lotteries determining the 'sacred marriages.' In addressing the Second Wave, Socrates conceded that 'our rulers will have to make considerable use of falsehood and deception for the benefit of those

they rule' (5.459c). Is Plato being inconsistent here? It may look that way at first, but on closer examination it seems not. After all, rulers can *employ* falsehoods even though they *hate* them and reluctantly use them only when something important is at stake, when the falsehood is beneficial to those it is being told to, and when it is the only or perhaps the most effective means to bringing about the benefit. And the distinction between true or genuine falsehoods and merely verbal falsehoods, which we met toward the end of Book II, blunts the charge of inconsistency as well. While rulers will find employing verbal falsehoods useful, presumably they will never employ the radically false and soul-distorting true or genuine falsehoods. The rulers can hate what is most truly or genuinely false but reluctantly employ mere verbal falsehoods, which are 'useful and so not deserving of hatred' (2.382c). Verbal falsehoods are like medicine (2.382c, 3.389b), after all, and medical treatment is one of Glaucon's main examples of goods that are 'onerous but beneficial' (2.357c), not intrinsically desirable (and perhaps intrinsically *un*desirable) but useful. While there may be a tension in Plato's view, upon reflection it seems to fall far short of inconsistency.

That this crucial philosophical virtue involves love should not be surprising, given the centrality of truth to the philosophical enterprise and indeed that philosophy is, etymologically, the love (*philein*) of wisdom (*sophia*). Love of truth pairs well with the role played by the guardian-rulers' love for the city back in Book III, which Socrates reminds us of here in Book VI: the rulers must be 'lovers of their city (φιλόπολις [*philopolis*])' (6.503a). We noted earlier Plato's playing up the *cognitive* dimension of love, focusing on the lover's belief that their beloved's flourishing is an essential part of their own flourishing. This is not to say that their love is *merely* cognitive, involving no feelings for the beloved or commitment to it. Perhaps Plato focuses on love's cognitive dimension because its affective dimension—how it feels—is so obvious and potent that it is likely to lead us to think of love as exclusively a matter of feeling. Plato, committed as he is to the centrality of reason in a well-lived life, wishes to remedy this by highlighting love's rational, cognitive side. Back in Book III Socrates claimed that 'the right kind of love (ὁ ὀρθὸς ἔρως [*ho orthos erôs*]) has nothing mad or licentious about it' and instead is 'the love of order

and beauty that has been moderated by education' (3.403a). Although we tend to think of *erôs*—erotic or romantic love—in terms of sexual passion, Plato argues in the *Symposium* that its proper object is the Form of or essence of beauty. The goal of the musical education, after all, is 'love of the fine and beautiful' (3.403c).

The love philosophers have and feel for the truth is στέργειν (*stergein*) rather than ἔρως or φιλία, but perhaps we should not read too much into this, as Plato does not here draw hard-and-fast distinctions between kinds of love as later authors are wont to do, e.g., between *philia, eros,* and *agapê* (friendly love, erotic or romantic love, and neighborly love). But it is telling that *stergein* typically refers to parental love, which clearly involves the parent's identifying their child's wellbeing with their own, and which involves a distinctive kind of affection.

Love of truth may well be the Socratic virtue par excellence, though when we first meet Thrasymachus, he insists that Socrates is φιλότιμος (*philotimos*), a lover of honor and victory (rather than truth) who just wants to win arguments. This seems an ironic projection on Thrasymachus' part, since he aims to persuade his audience of a pre-determined conclusion by the power of his rhetorical skill, rather than to investigate the matter and accept whatever conclusions reason leads us to. Knowing how to win arguments is the skill the sophist teaches, and it is the skill most at home in the law-court. Philosophical investigation also requires skill, and we have attended to some places where logical skill is not as developed as it should be. But philosophy requires more than skill, Plato suggests. It requires the virtue of loving the truth, which in turn implies a respect for rigor well expressed by Socrates' dictum that 'whatever direction the argument blows us, that is where we must go' (3.394d).

In addition to respect for rigor, another sub-virtue is open-mindedness, which we might think of as openness to rational persuasion. We noted earlier how the *Republic*'s opening exchange raises the opposition between force and persuasion. When Polemarchus jokingly asks, 'But could you persuade us, if we will not listen?' (1.327c), he is making the serious point that philosophical inquiry requires that we do not have a pre-determined outcome, as a lawyer trying a case might, or at least that we are open to countervailing reasons and evidence.

Intellectual Virtues and Character Virtues

An interesting feature of this leading philosophical virtue is that loving the truth seems to straddle two distinct kinds of virtues, intellectual virtue and character virtue. Perhaps because he was by nature less taxonomically inclined than his student Aristotle (whose inclinations in this regard were no doubt shaped by his biological investigations), Plato does not explicitly distinguish between these kinds of virtue, as Aristotle does in his seminal work in moral philosophy, the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Readers will recall that a virtue is the state or condition that enables its possessor to perform its function well, where its function is its purpose or characteristic activity. A knife's function is to cut, so sharpness is its virtue, since a knife must be sharp if it is to cut well. Where character virtues such as moderation and courage enable morally correct behavior, intellectual virtues such as wisdom are traits that enable their possessors to gain knowledge. The function or goal they enable is knowledge. So genuine philosophers, Socrates tells us, must possess intellectual virtues such as quickness or ease in learning (6.486c, 6.487a, 6.490c, 6.494b, 6.503c) and a good memory (6.490c, 6.494b, 6.503c). The absence of the latter trait allows Plato a few jokes along the way: Glaucon, in admitting that he has forgotten that they aim to make the city as a whole happy and just (7.519e), thereby implicitly concedes that he lacks a philosophical nature, at least to some degree. Even Socrates himself admits that he cannot remember whose question prompted his articulating this principle (5.465e). And clearly a good memory will be important to the agreement-based, question-and-answer method they have adopted to investigate the *Republic*'s two main questions.

Loving truth enables knowledge, since loving wealth or honor more than or instead of truth will hamper rather than enable learning. Thus love of truth seems, like being a quick learner or having a good memory, to be an intellectual virtue. But love of truth tells us not just about a person's intellect but also about their character, since it tells us about what they value. Thus it seems as much a virtue of character as an intellectual virtue. The person who loves the truth can be counted on to act well and rightly when for example truth and self-interest conflict. Moreover, some intellectual virtues such as quickness and

ease in learning are like skills in so far as they are morally neutral, depending for their moral status on the subjects learned and the end to which the knowledge gained is put. A quick learner with a good memory will master the mechanics of terrorism more quickly than a forgetful, slow learner will. Love of truth, by contrast, seems to lack this moral neutrality, as does wisdom—at least on Plato's conception of moral knowledge. If one really *knows* what is good, Plato has Socrates argue in the *Protagoras*, one would act on that knowledge if one were able to. The idea of knowing what is good or right but not acting on that knowledge—the problem of weakness of will—is not a genuine possibility. Exploring whether Plato was right about this will take us too far afield, and unsurprisingly there is much scholarly debate on the topic. But this melding of moral knowledge and moral conduct helps us see why *love of truth* has a foot on each side of the divide between intellectual and character virtues.

Another philosophic virtue worthy of our attention is high-mindedness (μεγαλοπρέπεια [*megaloprepeia*], which is sometimes translated as 'magnificence'). Like many of the virtues discussed in Book VI, we first met high-mindedness in Book III (e.g., 3.402c), where it was implicit in the musical-poetic cultivation of courage: 'a decent man does not think that death is a terrible thing for someone to suffer' (3.387d) and thus must be 'told stories that will make them least afraid of death' (3.386a). High-mindedness is a virtue of knowing what really matters, what is worth taking seriously. Socrates suggests that a high-minded person will not 'consider human life to be something important' (6.486a), but this is best taken as a point about life's *relative* importance. It is not valueless, something to be thrown away on a whim, but it is not as important as the good of the city. Living is not itself an intrinsic good, though living well is. And if living well, which for Plato requires living justly, requires sacrificing one's life for the good of one's city, then the high-minded person will (ideally) have no hesitation in doing so. High-mindedness looms in the background of Plato's deepest criticisms of poetry in Book X. 'Human affairs are not worth taking very seriously', Socrates insists in Book X (10.604b), and poetry is dangerously corrupting because it leads us to 'take [our] sufferings seriously' (10.605d). Readers familiar with Stoicism will see its Socratic roots in the virtue of high-mindedness.

Virtues of Personal Style

In addition to virtues of character and intellect, Socrates proposes another family of virtues as distinctive of the philosophical nature. Gracefulness, which we met back in Book III when discussing poetic meter or rhythm (e.g., 3.400c, 3.400d, 3.401a, 3.401d), is not a matter of character or intellect so much as a matter of personal, aesthetic style. Would-be philosopher-kings must be graceful (εὔχαρις [*eucharis*]) (5.487a), and indeed they approach the divine as they absorb gracefulness from studying the Forms (6.500c).

We meet a similar group of personal-aesthetic virtues in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where traits such as *wit* and *sociability* are on Aristotle's official list of virtues, on a par with canonical, cardinal virtues such as courage and moderation. The way Plato and Aristotle treat such traits suggests that they did not draw a sharp line between character and personality, between moral and non-moral traits, as we moderns tend to do. Their attitudes toward the personal-aesthetic virtues suggests a more holistic, integrated picture of human goodness on which calling someone 'a good person' is not an exclusively moral evaluation. There is a lively scholarly debate about whether our modern notion of morality is even to be found in ancient Greek philosophical thought. At the very least, it seems safe to say that beauty and goodness are more intimately connected for Plato and Aristotle than they are for us. Proper aesthetic sensibility is the basis for morality; and the crucial notion of what is *kalon*—fine or noble or beautiful—is inescapably aesthetic.

A Game of Checkers (6.487b–d)

It is perhaps surprising that a willingness to speak up and challenge assertions that others accept does not make Socrates' list of philosophical virtues. It is certainly an admirable trait, and one that Adeimantus displays with some frequency throughout the *Republic.* In Book II, after Glaucon raises the issues he want Socrates to address, Adeimantus insists that 'the most important thing' (which he takes to be the hypocritical way Athenian culture praises justice) 'has not been said yet' (2.362d). Book IV begins with Adeimantus questioning how ideal the ideal *polis* can be, given that the guardian-rulers' austere

lifestyle will leave them unhappy (4.419a). And Book V begins with Adeimantus (prompted by Polemarchus) interrupting Socrates' immediately moving to consider the *Republic*'s second question, when he still has questions about the way Socrates has answered the first, which prompts the Three Waves. Adeimantus shows that interrupting a speaker is not always rude, and he models a willingness to not be cowed by an intellectual superior.

Here in Book VI Adeimantus jumps in to answer a question Socrates has posed to Glaucon—not the first such interruption in the *Republic*—about whether he would be willing to 'entrust the city' to the philosopher-kings whose nature he has been describing (6.487a). Adeimantus does not object to particular claims Socrates has made; he does not deny that philosophers must be courageous or quick learners, nor does he challenge the status of the personal-aesthetic virtues. Instead, he offers a broader objection, suggesting that Socrates' whole procedure is unlikely to persuade anyone to 'entrust the city to [philosophers] and to them alone' (6.487a). He articulates the perspective of people who are not convinced by the Socratic chain or reasoning, feeling merely outmaneuvered and not persuaded:

> Just as inexperienced checkers players are trapped by the experts in the end and cannot make a move, so too they [i.e., your vanquished interlocutors] are trapped in the end and have nothing to say in this different kind of checkers, which is played not with disks but with words. Yet the truth is not affected by this outcome. I say this with a view to the present case, for someone might well say that he is unable to oppose you as you ask each of your questions, yet he sees that of all those who take up philosophy [...] the greatest number become cranks, not to say completely vicious, while those who seem completely decent are rendered useless to the city because of the studies you recommend. (6.487b–d)

Polemarchus, for one, knows whereof Adeimantus speaks: Socrates argued in Book I that defining justice as benefiting friends and harming enemies led to the conclusion that the just person is a kind of thief and justice itself is a craft of stealing. When asked if this is what he meant, Polemarchus insists, 'No, by god, it is not. I do not know any more what I did mean, but I still believe that to benefit one's friends and harm one's enemies is justice' (1.334b). There were good reasons for him to resist the conclusion Socrates has led him to, but even though he did not see

what these reasons were and thus how he could resist the conclusion, Polemarchus hung on to his definition of justice, feeling outmaneuvered by Socrates rather than persuaded by him.

Adeimantus is not accusing Socrates of acting in bad faith but rather is pointing out that Socrates is perceived by many of his fellow citizens not as better at arriving at moral truth but simply better at intellectual checkers than they are. They can and will persist in believing their seemingly refuted views, since Socrates' philosophical argumentation seems to be nothing more than 'a kind of game of contradiction' (7.539b). In short, to Socrates' question about entrusting the city to philosopher-kings, the solution to the Third Wave—Adeimantus seems to be saying, 'Well, *I* might entrust the city to them, Socrates, but most people will not. Why would they, when they think of philosophers as useless at best and vicious at worse? They will nod in seeming agreement with you, but nothing you have said so far will change their minds: they think you are just playing word-games.'

It is no accident that it is Adeimantus who in Book II insists—twice (2.367b–e)—that Socrates not merely give yet another 'theoretical argument' that the just life is happier. Here he is doing much the same thing, asking not for a reworked version of the Powers Argument but for something less abstract and more accessible. Socrates obliged Adeimantus' request in Book II by offering the city-soul analogy, which of course structures the rest of the *Republic,* and here in Book VI he responds in a similar but even more procedurally transparent vein: 'The question you ask needs to be answered by means of an image or simile' (6.487e). So Socrates will meet Adeimantus' checkers metaphor with one of his own, meant to show why his fellow citizens regard philosophers as useless.

Analogical thinking is at the heart of the *Republic.* Its very method is analogical, asking us to think about the nature and value of justice as a virtue of persons by first thinking about it as a virtue of city-states. Here in Book VI, Socrates explicitly appeals to similes (6.487e, 6.488a, 6.489a) and analogies (the Greek terms are εἰκών [*eikôn:* likeness, image, reflection], from which we get the English word 'icon', and ἀνάλογον [*analogon:* proportionate to, resembling], from which we get the English word 'analogy'). Socrates, who describes himself as 'greedy for images' (6.488a), is forgoing the 'longer and fuller road' that leads to 'precise

answer[s]' (4.435c) in favor of a less demanding path that offers a view of the same truths the more demanding path leads to, but the view is less clear and distinct. The road of dialectic, which requires doing without hypotheses and metaphors (6.511ae, 7.533c), is not just longer; it is a 'rough, steep path' (7.515e) that only those few who are blessed with a philosophical nature are capable of following. The rest of us—most of us, given that 'the majority cannot be philosophic' (6.494a)—will have to be content with an easier, less rigorous path. In the next chapter we will explore the major metaphors of Books VI and VII—the analogies of the Sun, Line, and Cave. Here we will look briefly at Socrates' analogical response to Adeimantus' challenge. Given the critique of painting, poetry, and the other imitative arts that awaits us in Book X, it is striking that here Socrates embraces the role of painter (γραφής [*graphês*] (6.488a)) as he constructs his analogies.

The Ship of State Sails the Third Wave (6.487e–490e)

Socrates' surprising response to Adeimantus' suggestion that most people think that philosophers are useless at best and vicious at worst is that 'they seem to me to speak the truth' (6.487d). The 'seem' will turn out to be important: Socrates does not think genuine philosophers really *are* useless or vicious, but he understands that people who do not distinguish the genuine philosophers from the pretenders will think they are. It is in this spirit that he offers the Ship of State analogy, hoping to explain 'what the most decent people experience in relation to their city' (6.488a) and why they think philosophers are useless.

Think of the city as a ship, he suggests. Whom should the owner select as its captain? Obviously, the owner *should* select the person who possesses 'the art of navigation' (6.488b), since only a person possessing the relevant nautical skills has sufficient knowledge to chart the appropriate course to get the ship safely to its destination. But the owner, who knows nothing of navigation and is near-sighted and hard of hearing, to boot, will not choose 'the true captain' (6.488e), alas. The sailors clamor for the job, but while each of them understands his particular role on the ship and can follow the captain's orders, none of them is qualified to give such orders, despite thinking they are. (This is an early instance of the Dunning-Kruger Effect, a cognitive bias leading

people to overestimate their abilities and fail to recognize their lack of competence in certain areas.) The owner chooses not the person skilled in navigation but rather 'the person who is clever at persuading or forcing the shipowner' (6.488d), with predictably bad results. And analogously the citizens choose for their ruler not the person who possesses wisdom and knows what is best for the city as a whole, but rather someone who charms and flatters them. 'But why blame the philosophers and regard them as useless?', Socrates seems to ask. That they are not in fact chosen for the job for which they are qualified tells us more about their fellow citizens than it does about them. Just as genuine captains do not beg ship owners for jobs or doctors do not beg the sick to be allowed to treat them, 'it is not for the ruler, if he is truly any use, to beg the others to accept his rule' (6.489c).

Rulers, doctors, and captains are entitled to maintain their self-respect, which presumably entitles them to refuse to sing along to the Temptations' 'Ain't Too Proud to Beg' as they go about their business. But given that what is at stake is the wellbeing of the city, perhaps this seemingly legitimate pride is a vice, not a virtue. We will see in Book VII that Socrates thinks that possessing political wisdom does not in itself entail an obligation to seek to govern; only a philosopher-king or -queen raised by the ideal city would be under such an obligation. One might think that those who possess political wisdom should be sufficiently interested in the wellbeing of their city for a bit of begging to be in order. This might seem to go against Plato's dictum that 'it is those who are not lovers of ruling who must rule' (7.521b), but one can be willing to rule without loving ruling, if only to avoid the punishment of being 'ruled by someone worse than oneself' (1.347c). The historian Gordon Wood remarks that at least early in American political life, 'Gentlemen generally stood, not ran, for election, and canvassing for an office, as [Aaron] Burr was said to have done for the vice-presidency in 1792, was widely thought to be improper'.[1] Perhaps Socrates shares something like this view and thus regards actively seeking office as unseemly.

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1   Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 160.

Tending the Beast (6.490e–495a)

Against those genuine, wisdom-possessing philosophers are people who *seem* to possess wisdom but actually do not: sophists. If we think of the citizens of Athens as 'a huge, strong beast' (6.493a), these sophists have a knack for learning how best to placate the beast, how to take advantage of its moods and satisfy its appetites. But the pseudo-philosophical sophist 'knows nothing about which of [the beast's] convictions is fine or shameful, good or bad, just or unjust, but he applies all these names in accordance with how the beast reacts—calling what it enjoys good, and what angers it bad. He has no other account to give of these terms' (6.493b). The sophist's 'wisdom' consists in telling the beast what it wants to hear, which echoes a point Socrates made earlier: 'The person who is honored and considered clever and wise in importance matters by such badly governed cities is the one who serves them most pleasantly, indulges them, flatters them, anticipates their wishes, and is clever at fulfilling them' (4.426c). Sophists, mere pretenders to wisdom, are adept at 'tending the beast' (6.493b), but their skill lies in persuasion, not truth-seeking. (In the dialogue the *Gorgias,* Plato has Socrates suggest that the sophists fall short of possessing skill or craft (τέχνη [*technê*]) and instead merely have a 'knack' (ἐμπειρία [*empeiria*], whence the word 'empirical') but we can safely ignore that interesting issue here.) What they possess is not wisdom, but it is not really surprising that it passes for wisdom. After all, most of us are prey to flattery, and for Socrates and Plato, 'the majority cannot be philosophic' (6.494a)—hence the anti-democratic nature of the ideal *polis*. For Plato, it is not merely the case that most of us *do not* possess wisdom, but rather that most of us *cannot* possess it. Given his conception of knowledge, we can see why he holds this strongly anti-democratic view. Wisdom is knowledge of what is best for the city as a whole, and to possess such knowledge one must grasp the Form of the good. Only someone with this stable, true model of goodness will be able to 'establish here on earth conventions of what is fine or just or good' (6.484d). Readers who do not share Socrates' austere conception of knowledge will likely think that genuine wisdom, while still rare and very different from the focus-group politicking of modern sophists, is more common than Socrates allows.

Shelter from the Storm (6.496a–497c)

Suppose that Socrates is right that no one can be happy in a *polis* not governed by philosophers. Given 'the madness of the majority' and the fact that 'hardly anyone acts sanely in public affairs' (6.496c), a person trying to live well—which requires living justly—is 'like a man who has fallen among wild animals and is neither willing to join them in doing injustice nor sufficiently strong to oppose the general savagery alone' (6.496d). What should such a person do? I suspect that many readers will be disappointed by Socrates' answer. For rather than urging political engagement to reform and improve a *polis* that falls short of their ideals of justice or advocating revolution to overthrow a *polis* that is not merely non-just but is positively unjust, Socrates instead counsels withdrawal from public affairs, urging those who want to live justly in unjust city-states to 'lead a quiet life and do their own work [...] like someone who takes refuge under a little wall from a storm [...] [and] is satisfied if he can somehow lead his present life free from injustice and impious acts and depart from it with good hope, blameless and content' (6.496d).

Many politically inclined readers will reject this approach, seeing it as acquiescent to injustice, but the fair-minded among them should be able to appreciate why some will find it attractive. While Socrates' preferred path seems apolitical, its defenders might reply that he is actually offering a different kind of politics, one that is interior rather than exterior: keep the constitution of the ideal city firmly in mind and 'make oneself its citizen' (9.592b). As with the virtue of high-mindedness discussed earlier, we can see here the seeds of the stoic idea of cosmopolitanism: one is not primarily a citizen of the city-state one inhabits in space and time but rather a universal *polis*. And surely high-mindedness is at work as one seeks shelter from the storm: if indeed 'Human affairs are not worth taking very seriously' (10.604b), why not tend to one's inner *polis* rather than muck about in the outer one, especially since that outer *polis* will be genuinely habitable only by a remarkable stroke of luck or by divine intervention:

> no city, constitution, or individual man will ever become perfect until either some chance event compels those few philosophers who are not vicious (the ones who are now called useless) to take charge of a city,

whether they want to or not, and compels the city to obey them, or until
a god inspires the present rulers and kings or their offspring with a true
erotic love for true philosophy. (6.499b)

Many readers will share Socrates' pessimism about the likelihood that
the—or an—ideal *polis* can be realized in the actual world, but many will
be troubled at his seeming to reject political action as well as what seems
to be his focus on the ideal world rather than the admittedly imperfect
actual world.

Looking at how Socrates himself lived in Athens, a *polis* that fell
far short of the ideal that Plato sketches in the *Republic,* might be
instructive here. Did Socrates follow his own advice? He did *not* pack
up and leave, even after being convicted of impiety and corrupting the
youth in a trial that, however procedurally fair it was, yielded what
seems a substantively unjust verdict. He refuses to leave, because the
best arguments lead him to conclude that leaving would be unjust.
Socrates did not 'lead a quiet life'; if he had, it is unlikely that we
would ever have heard of him or that Athens would have treated him
as it did. But he 'did his own work', as he conceived of it. His God-
given work, he tells us in the *Apology*, was to be a gadfly, questioning
and exhorting Athenians to virtue (30e). In his final words to the
jurors, he asks them to do for his sons what he tried to do for them:
to correct them 'if they seem to care about riches, or anything, more
than about virtue' (41e).

So it seems that Socrates did not live the quiet life he counsels. But
when the so-called Thirty Tyrants, installed by Sparta to govern Athens
after the end of the Peloponnesian War, demanded that Socrates bring
them Leon of Salamis for execution, he refused, regarding the act as
unjust and impious. So his eschewing politics did not entail complicity
in injustice or collaboration with the unjust. Alas, though, he did not
try to prevent others from doing so, nor did he try to warn Leon. While
the others went to Salamis to fetch Leon, Socrates 'went quietly home'
(32d).

Some Suggestions for Further Reading

For an excellent discussion of virtue and the virtues, interested readers should see Heather Battaly, *Virtue* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015).

The philosophical literature on truth is vast. A good place to start is Michael P. Lynch, *True to Life: Why Truth Matters* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/6919.001.0001

Readers interested in the question of morality and the ancient Greeks will benefit from Richard Kraut, 'Doing without Morality', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 30 (2006), 159–200, although his focus is explicitly on Aristotle. Bernard Williams famously claims that 'Greek ethical thought [...] basically lacks the concept of *morality* altogether', in the chapter 'Philosophy', in *The Legacy of Greece: A New Appraisal*, ed. by M.I. Finley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 202–55.

Readers interested in the personal-aesthetic virtues will find much of interest in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, excellently translated by Terence Irwin (2nd ed., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1999), especially Book IV, which discusses virtues such as friendliness, wit, and magnificence.

Readers interested in the trial and death of Socrates will want to read at least the *Apology* and *Crito*, available (among other places) in *Five Dialogues*: *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, trans. by G. M. A. Grube, ed. by John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002), which contains other dialogues of great interest. Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) is an excellent discussion, and I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989) offers an interesting and very unsympathetic take on Socrates. Xenophon, *Conversations of Socrates*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), presents an interestingly different picture of Socrates than Plato does, though both are Socrates' contemporaries.