BLACKWELL BRISTOL LECTURES ON GREECE, ROME AND THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

Why Plato Wrote

Danielle S. Allen

WILEY-BLACKWELL

Contents

Blackwell Bristol Lectures on Greece, Rome and the Classical Tradition

Current Series Editor: Neville Morley

The Bristol Institute of Greece, Rome and the Classical Tradition promotes the study of Greco-Roman culture from antiquity to the present day, in the belief that classical culture remains a vital influence in the modern world. It embraces research and education in many fields, including history of all kinds, archaeology, literary studies, art history and philosophy, with particular emphasis on links between the ancient and modern worlds. The Blackwell Bristol lectures showcase the very best of modern scholarship in Classics and the Classical Tradition.

Published

Why Plato Wrote

Danielle Allen

Tales of the Barbarians: Ethnography and Empire in the Roman West Greg Woolf

Why Plato Wrote

Danielle S. Allen

WILEY-BLACKWELL
A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2010

Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

Editorial Offices

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148–5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services, and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Allen, Danielle S., 1971- Why Plato wrote/Danielle S. Allen.

p. cm. – (Blackwell-Bristol lectures on Greece, Rome and the classical tradition) Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4443-3448-7 (hardback)

1. Plato. 2. Authorship-Psychological aspects. I. Title. B395.A53 2010

184-dc22

2010027875

For all my teachers and students

ἔνθα πολιτείας μὲν οὐχ ἥψατο, καίτοι πολιτικὸς ὢν ἐξ ὧν γέγραφεν.

And in his own city he did not meddle with political affairs, although he was a politician or political leader to judge from his writings. (Diog. Laert. 3.23)

Acknowledgments

This book grew from the four Bristol-Blackwell lectures that I gave at the University of Bristol in May 2008. First and foremost I owe thanks to the hosts of that event: Al Bertrand, Gillian Clark, Bob Fowler, Charles Martindale, and Neville Morley. I am grateful too to their colleagues, all such warm hosts also: Chris Bertram, Terrell Carver, Sarah Hitch, Kurt Lampe, Nico Momigliano, and Giles Pearson. The 2009 Lionel Trilling Lecture at Columbia University, a Friday night lecture at St. John's College, and the 2010 Benedict Lectures at Boston University provided the opportunity to summarize the book's argument before engaged and challenging audiences. I am particularly grateful to the respondents on those occasions, including Nadia Urbinati, Katja Vogt, Amelie Rorty, David Roochnik, and Mitch Miller for trenchant commentary.

Two decades of conversation have gone into this book. I'd like to thank the students in seminars I taught at the University of Chicago on Plato's *Menexenus, Republic,* and *Theaetetus,* colleagues in the "Moral Authority of Nature" working group at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin and in the Language, History, and Political Thought group at the University of Chicago as well as audiences at Baylor University, Bryn Mawr College, Cambridge University, Columbia University, Harvard University, the Institute for Advanced Study, University of Michigan, Princeton University, the University of Southern California, and several American Political Science Association annual meetings.

The research conclusions of several former dissertation students are assimilated here, as indicated in the notes, particularly those of Brendan Boyle, Alex Gottesman, Hugh Liebert, Jennifer London, Emily Nacol, John Paulas, Daniela Reinhard, and Neil Roberts. Working with each was a great joy.

This book has also benefited tremendously from exchanges with William Allen, Graham Burnett, Caroline Bynum, James Conant, Lorraine Daston, Mary Dietz, Jimmy Doyle, Peter Euben, Chris Faraone, Simon Goldhill, Kevin Hawthorne, Bonnie Honig, Leslie Kurke, Gabriel Lear, Jonathan Lear, Patrick McGuinn, Maureen McLane, Patchen Markell, Eric Maskin, Sara Monoson, Mary Nichols, Jennifer Pitts, Robin Osborne, Malcolm Schofield, Melissa Schwartzberg, Rick Schweder, Joan Scott, Kendall Sharp, George Shulman, Laura Slatkin, Marc Stears, Lisa van Alstyne, Robert von Hallberg, John Wallach, and Michael Walzer. Special thanks go to those who read the whole manuscript in draft, saw beyond where I had gotten, and inspired me to the final phase of this work: Paul Cartledge, John Cooper, Jill Frank, Richard Kraut, Melissa Lane, and Josh Ober.

Errors are mine.

The author and publisher gratefully acknowledge the permission granted to reproduce the copyright material in this book:

Reprinted by permission of the publishers and the Trustees of the Loeb Classical Library from *Plato:* Volume IX, translated by R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library Volume 234, pp. 486, 488-490, 494-496, 498, 512-514, 516-518, 528, 530-534, 538-540, 552, 562, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Copyright (c) 1929 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. The Loeb Classical Library® is a registered trademark of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

G. R. F. Ferrari, *Plato: The Republic,* translated by Tom Griffith, 2000, © in the translation and editorial matter Cambridge University Press 2000, reproduced with permission.

The information used to generate the map on p. 96 comes from R. Ginouves and M. Hatzopoulos, eds. 1994. *Macedonia*

from Philip II to the Roman Conquest. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 48-49.

Abbreviations

Aes.	Aeschines
Ath. Pol.	Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians (Athênaiôn politeia)*
Dem.	Demosthenes
Diels–Kranz	*Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz. Zurich: Weidmann, 1985
Diog. Laert.	Diogenes Laertius
Din.	Dinarchus
Diod.	Diodorus
F. Gr. Hist.	*Fragmenta historicorum graecorum*, ed. K. Muller. Paris: Didot, 1851
Hyp.	Hyperides
Kassel–Austen, PCG	*Poetae comici graeci*, ed. R. Kassel and C. Austin. Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 1983–
Kock, *CAF*	*Comicorum atticorum fragmenta*, ed. T. Kock. 3 vols. Leipzig: Teubner, 1880–1888
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae*
LSJ	*A Greek–English Lexicon*, ed. H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, revised and augmented by Sir Henry Stuart Jones. 9th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996 [1940]
Lyc.	Lycurgus
Meineke, CGF	*Fragmenta comicorum graecorum*, ed. A. Meineke, vols. 1–3. Berlin: Reimer, 1840
Paus.	Pausanias
Plato works:	
Apol.	*Apology*
Def.	*Definitions*
Prot.	*Protagoras*
Rep.	*Republic*
Symp.	*Symposium*
Plut.	Plutarch

Plutarch works:	
Dem.	*Demosthenes*
Mor.	*Moralia*
Phoc.	*Phocion*
Thuc.	Thucydides
TLG	*Thesaurus linguae graecae*. Available online at http://www.tlg.uci.edu/
Tod	*Greek Historical Inscriptions from the Sixth* Century BC to the Death of Alexander the Great, ed. M. N. Tod. Chicago: Ares, 1985
SEG	*Supplementum epigraphicum graecum*

Prologue Why Think about Plato?

Why write about Plato nearly 2400 years after his death? Don’t we understand him by now?

We do and we don’t. But more important than whether humanity’s collective knowledge about Plato, built up over centuries, includes mastery of his systematic philosophy is whether our generation understands Plato at all.

The grand total of human knowledge might be conceived in either of two ways. One might think of it as the sum of all the intellectual material in all the books in all the libraries of the world; this mountain of text would include everything that has already been said about Plato, or any other subject, from the beginning of time. On this conception, each scholarly project on Plato rolls one more small stone up onto the accumulated pile of human contributions to interpreting his works; one would imagine that each contribution would yield smaller and smaller returns and that humanity would eventually exhaust the subject.

But one might rather conceive of human knowledge as the sum of what all human beings currently alive know and understand. Everyone starts life with little knowledge or understanding; everyone dies with a lifetime’s treasury. On this conception, the sum of human knowledge is what each generation wins for itself between birth and death. To some extent, any given generation can speed up its self-education by teaching itself what earlier generations have already discovered; to some extent, any given generation must discover things for itself. On this second conception of the sum of human knowledge, a scholarly project on Plato lights up yet again, for this generation, as earlier scholars have for their own generations, a range of questions and ideas

significant to human life. Sometimes one manages to light up questions that have been dark for a long time.

I prefer this second conception of human knowledge. After all, if all the books in the world contained the secret of life, but no one had read them, how much actual knowledge about the secret of life would be alive in the world? Humanistic scholarship activates knowledge and understanding here and now – both by reclaiming things that have been known by earlier generations and by asking and introducing, where necessary, fresh questions and new ideas. Nor does reclaiming past intellectual gains require agreement with them. They are a valuable property, an inheritance, because they help us grasp the conceptual alternatives that frame human life; but we will agree with some and disagree with other ideas from earlier generations. The project of coming to understanding *now* is a matter of deciding for ourselves where to agree or not.

This book both reclaims what has been known and understood about Plato by earlier generations and introduces new ideas.

So how can it happen that a person might have a new idea about a subject as long-lived as Plato's philosophy? Reactivating older bodies of knowledge for present use often seems also to spur discovery. Why is that?

Human knowledge is inevitably partial, by which I mean both incomplete and situated: the combined total of human knowledge emanates from hundreds of billions of individuals each situated in a specific place and time and with individualized curiosities, preoccupations, and desires. As we ourselves learn what our predecessors have known, we discover not only their successes – ideas worthy of being relit – but also their limits – conceptual points where corrections, revisions, subtractions, or additions are necessary. Our own views will have similar blemishes; we should never pretend otherwise.

In my own case, some accidental discoveries, made meaningful by technological contingencies, led me to question how earlier scholars had interpreted Plato's view of the relation between philosophy and politics.

What were the accidental discoveries? And what do I mean by "technological contingencies"?

About fifteen years ago, when I was working on my dissertation on the politics of punishing in democratic Athens of the fourth century bce, I noticed that some of Plato's philosophical vocabulary appeared in speeches given by Athenian politicians. Some of Aristotle's vocabulary showed up too. But this wasn't supposed to happen. Hadn't the execution of Socrates by the Athenians caused Plato such disillusionment with his home city that he had turned his back on politics? And since Aristotle wasn't even a citizen, his political engagement had been entirely with the Macedonians, principally as tutor to Alexander the Great, no? Students are told year after year that in Athens after the death of Socrates philosophy and politics lived separate lives.[1] They learn that during the fourth century BCE an ideal of contemplation took hold; philosophy became identified with time spent away from practical realities in peaceful retreats where ceaseless conversation could be oriented toward securing knowledge, not society's daily needs. What, then, were these fragments of philosophical vocabulary doing in political speeches?

I was not the first scholar to notice that, for instance, a speech by the politician Lycurgus, which charges a citizen named Leocrates with treason, was remarkably full of Platonic vocabulary.[2] But was I the first to notice that a key term in Aristotle's ethical theory, *prohairesis,* which means "deliberated commitment," turned up frequently in late fourth-century Athenian political speeches? Maybe.[3] Whatever the case, once I had noticed the migration of

these concepts from philosophy to politics, I was able to do something earlier scholars couldn't: I ran the terms through a computer database of Greek texts to see whether patterns emerged in their usage.[4] Were these two examples one-offs? Or could one spot some more systematic movement of philosophical concepts into politics?

As we shall see in chapter 6, patterns did emerge. First, the relevant terms *(prohairesis* and also the word *kolasis,* which refers to a reformative approach to punishment) seem genuinely to have originated with Plato and/or Aristotle; they were largely unused by earlier writers. Second, the political use of these and related terms had a distinct chronological pattern; the terminological migration seems to have begun in the 350s BCE. Third, some politicians took up the philosophical vocabulary more eagerly than others; and at least one politician actively resisted at least the Platonic vocabulary. What was one to make of these facts, newly visible thanks to technological contingency? It has taken more than a decade to answer that question.

I was not alone in my confusion over how to understand the relationship between philosophical ideas and political events. If anything, social scientists freely admit uncertainty with regard to this question.[5] In 1936 the economist John Maynard Keynes wrote: "The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood."[6] Three decades later, another economist, Albert O. Hirschman wrote the following about the decline in the seventeenth century of a heroic ethos and rise of a valorization of commercial activity: "This astounding transformation of the moral and ideological scene erupts quite suddenly, and the historical and psychological reasons for it are still not wholly understood."[7]

What are the processes by which intellectuals' ideas come to shape a community's values? When non-philosophers adopt concepts from philosophers, getting them partly wrong and partly right, using and abusing them to particular, strategic ends, how should we think about the degree of "influence" on social events wielded by those philosophers and their concepts? In what sense might the ideas of economists and political philosophers be "powerful," as Keynes put it? Why isn't the role of ideas in politics well understood, as both Keynes and Hirschman indicate? Although these questions are old, and even trite, we still don't have good answers. As I pondered the movement of terms like *kolasis* (reformative punishment) and *prohairesis* (deliberated commitment) from philosophical to political argument, versions of these questions, linking Plato and Aristotle to Athenian politics, preoccupied me.

About half way through the period of my consternation and confusion, it suddenly occurred to me to ask the question: Why did Plato write anyway? His teacher, Socrates, had not done so. Socrates had insisted on philosophy as an oral practice directed toward the examination of self and other. If anything, he appears to have disdained writing. Why, then, should his ardent disciple have pursued an altogether different way of life? I soon realized that asking and answering the question, "Why did Plato write?" might provide us with philosophical and historical treasure.

Plato wrote, but he never wrote to speak in his own voice. He wrote dialogues representing conversations among various casts of characters. Very often, but not always, Socrates played the lead role. Socrates' opinions (at least as represented by Plato) are therefore those one most immediately takes from any given Platonic dialogue as the main ideas. This has led to the perennial question of how

one can distinguish the ideas and opinions of teacher and pupil. What did Plato think, actually, if we hear, in his dialogues, only ever from Socrates? It occurred to me that, since Plato had chosen to write, when Socrates had not, if we could figure out *why* Plato wrote, we would know something fundamental about the philosophical differences between him and Socrates.[8]

Happily, this question, "Why did Plato write?" turned out also to be the key to the appearance of Platonic formulations in the mouths of Athenian politicians. Plato wrote, among other purposes, to effect political change. Yes, Plato was the world's first systematic political philosopher, using text to record technical philosophical advances, but he was also, it appears, the western world's first think-tank activist and its first message man.[9] He wrote – not solely but consistently – to change Athenian culture and thereby transform Athenian politics.[10] As Diogenes Laertius, one of the most important biographers of Plato, put it, "in his own city Plato did not meddle with political affairs, although he was a politician or political leader *[politikos* in the Greek], to judge from his writings" *(entha politeias men ouch hêpsato, kaitoi politikos ôn ex hôn gegraphen).*[11]

But the question of "Why Plato wrote" and the answer that he wrote as a politician raise the further question of who would have read Plato's dialogues. Historians concur that in the fourth century most male Athenian citizens would have had the basic literacy necessary for the city's political business, which involved written laws, decrees, and lists of names identifying who was obligated to serve in particular capacities.[12] But such citizenly literacy would have developed into higher forms only for a smaller circle of elites who received formal education.[13] But we know that, as far as this social group was concerned, Plato's books did travel. We hear that one woman, Axiothea of Philesia, was drawn

from her Peloponnesian city to Athens to study with Plato on account of having read the *Republic.*[14] Some range of elite Athenians (and foreigners) would have had access to Plato's written texts. Perhaps even some non-elite citizens would have too: Socrates, in Plato's *Apology,* remarks that Anaxagoras' books were easily available to anyone in the market-place for a drachma *(Apol.* 6). But then again, a drachma would have been the better part of a day's wage for a laborer.[15]

While it is unlikely that Athens achieved general literacy for citizens during Plato's lifetime, one of his characters advocated such a goal in the *Laws* (810a).[16] In the ideal city described in that dialogue, all citizens would be able to read books like Plato's. This means Plato could imagine a general reader for his dialogues, and my argument in this book is that he developed a mode of philosophical writing that anticipated such readers even in advance of their general emergence.

Reading was not, however, the only way to learn about philosophy in Athens. Plato gave at least one public lecture, and Aristotle gave several. The subject of Plato's lecture was "the good," while Aristotle's public lectures were about rhetoric. We can't help but notice that the subject of Plato's lecture was also the subject of the middle books of the *Republic.* All we know about his lecture, though, is that attendees complained that it had too much to do with mathematics. curiously, this complaint is also familiar to anyone who has tried to teach the middle books of the *Republic.*[17] It's plausible that some of what Plato said in that lecture would have overlapped with what he wrote. Whatever the case, since Plato did give this public lecture, and Aristotle too gave public lectures, we know that the circle of Athenians exposed to Plato's ideas, and philosophy

generally, extended beyond the students enrolled in his school, the Academy.

In fact, that circle also stretched to include the tens of thousands of citizens who attended the comic theater. Just as toward the end of the fifth century Aristophanes had mocked Socrates with a real understanding of Socrates' ideas, so too later comic poets seemed to get Plato.[18] Thus, Theopompus mocks: "'For *one thing is no longer only one, but two things now are scarcely one,'* as Plato says."[19] Theopompus is clearly jabbing at the importance to Plato of the idea of number, as well as at Plato's commitment to the unity of the good. Word had spread broadly enough about Plato's ideas, then, including even the metaphysical ones, for them to be the basis for jokes meant to be accessible to the ordinary, even minimally literate, Athenian citizen. And those who didn't get the joke at least learned that Plato was up to some funny business with numbers. Plato's written dialogues would, though, have anchored these alternative forms of dissemination through the lectures and plays.

Importantly, to identify Plato as a message man is not to diminish his status as a philosopher. First, these were and are not mutually exclusive roles, and Plato pursued both.[20] Second, Plato's pursuit of language that might shift cultural norms was itself philosophically grounded, as we shall see. The effort to answer the question, "Why did Plato write?" leads us deep into his philosophy of language, which in turn provides at least provisional answers to the sorts of questions raised by Keynes, Hirschman, and others in the social sciences about how ideas intersect with social life. Most importantly, Plato's philosophy of language indicates that the route to explaining the relation between ideas and events requires bringing together the resources of multiple disciplines: linguistics, psychology, and sociology, at least.

In his dialogues, Plato offers an argument about the linguistic, psychological, and social processes by which ideas gain a hold on the human imagination. Like the linguist and cultural theorist George Lakoff, he makes a case for the powerful effects of metaphor and allegory on the dissemination of concepts, information, and evaluative schema. Like the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, he analyzes how the proximity of mothers to children, the charisma of paternal authority, and the fear of death generate psychological phenomena in individuals that anchor their moral values. Like the French historian and theorist of power, Michel Foucault, he argues that social norms are disseminated not only through texts and other media of verbal communication but also through material realities themselves; like Foucault, he understood that human beings build their worlds – including their social practices and material objects – around their core values, with the result that those social practices and material objects themselves convey dominant social norms.[21]

On Plato's account, the social power of ideas arises from how well their verbal expression exploits the resources of metaphor, how closely they respond to psychic structures arising from maternal proximity, paternal authority, and the fear of death, and how available they are for transformation into rules of action that generate concrete practices and material effects. Speakers and writers who mobilize any of these sources of power inherent in language seek to acquire a surplus of linguistic power (or social influence) beyond the average quantities available to each of us every day in ordinary talk.[22]

In writing his dialogues, Plato, I will argue, sought to generate exactly such surplus linguistic power as a means to acquire social power within his own city, ancient Athens of the fourth century BCE. As a part of explaining how philosophers' ideas can have power, he makes the strongest

possible case that I know of for language as a potential cause of social and political change. His argument is not, however, that somehow philosophers' ideas – their reigning concepts – are transmitted whole (unchanged and unadapted) to their publics, with political consequences flowing immediately out from those ideas. He recognizes the anarchic structure of the lives of human beings in language. As words and concepts move from person to person, there are myriad forms of slippage, misapprehension, metonymic extension, and Freudian replacement, not to mention the constantly trailing shadow of the antitheses of the concepts under discussion. Plato's argument is therefore not that any given author can finally control how her ideas are taken up and used but that an author can at least dramatically increase the likelihood that her ideas *will be* taken up and used. And the more likely that an author's ideas are to be used, the greater the number of that author's ideas that are likely to circulate broadly. Finally, Plato also seems to have thought that, whenever an author's ideas are systematically linked to each other through metaphorical structures and as the number of such linked concepts that are taken up by other users increases, the less will the new uses of those concepts deviate from the author's own original conceptual schema. It is when we can see sets of linked concepts that appeared in the work of a philosopher appearing again in social discourse, still linked in the same ways, that we can say not merely that people have begun to use these new concepts but also that the thinker who produced them has had an influence. And when we can see that people are using such sets of linked concepts to define decisive political choices for themselves, we can say that the philosopher has had an influence on politics.

Many people reading this book will think that Plato's view of the quantities of social power available to be tapped through the careful use of language is optimistic in the

extreme, and even inclines to folly. Indeed, Plato seems to have thought that the kinds of linguistic power that he analyzed, developed, and propounded, particularly in the *Republic,* which lays out the structure of a utopian city, depended for their full effects on operating within a homogeneous community. His political thought included an argument for a sort of ethno-nationalism, and in the *Republic* Socrates argues that the disintegration of the utopian city will begin when the city ceases to provide its young with the right sort of education in symbols, a failure that is cast as simultaneous to a breakdown of the utopia's eugenic match-making practices.[23] A homogeneous community can maintain a more stable linguistic universe over time; communications among its members should transpire with a higher ratio of signal to noise than in contexts of diversity.[24] Plato's theory of linguistic power, and his press to maximize such power with his own texts, would be blunted in a world of diversity where the anarchic structure of the lives of human beings in language is heightened.

Yet this does not mean that we, living with diversity of necessity and by choice embracing it (I hope), should disregard Plato's arguments about how the work of intellectuals affects social life. There is something right about his theory of the power of metaphor, of the psychological consequences of maternal proximity, paternal charisma, and the fear of death, and of the discursive basis of our material lives. He hasn't gotten the whole story right – about how ideas come to have social power and effects – but he has gotten *something* right. If we wish to understand the role played by ideas in social processes, we could profit from taking Plato's account seriously. Once we have understood it, we can proceed to revise it, or to build an alternative.

The primary focus of this book, then, is on Plato and on answering the question, Why did Plato write? – but the answer requires beginning to identify the theoretical positions outlined just above. For the time being, I can make only a beginning of the latter work. A full account of Plato's theory of language and its usefulness for understanding the relationship between ideas and events, or discourse and structure, will have to wait. My hope, though, is that this book, in addition to answering the question of why Plato wrote, will mark trailheads that might be pursued toward the goal of answering our long-lived questions about the relationships between ideas and events.

Part I

Why Plato Wrote

1

Who Was Plato?

When Plato, son of Ariston and Perictione, was born to an aristocratic family in Athens in 424/3 BCE, he had two elder brothers, Adeimantus and Glaucon, roughly eight and five years older. Glaucon, at least, would soon be an aspiring politician.[1] Plato also had two uncles, Critias and Charmides, who were intensely involved in Athenian politics and who, in 404/3 BCE, joined a group of aristocrats in an oligarchic take-over of the democratic city.[2] It seems they invited young Plato to join them. He was then just twenty, the age at which young Athenian men usually got involved in politics, but he declined the invitation. Some years earlier his life had already taken an interesting turn; he had met the famous wise man Socrates, who lived from 469 to 399 BCE. Now, at age twenty, he began to follow Socrates formally.

The word philosopher wasn't yet much in use during the years that Socrates frequented the Athenian city center and market-place or *agora*; Socrates would generally have been called a *sophistês*.[3] This word literally means "wise man" but came to have the negative connotation of "sophist," a person who fast-talks his way out of moral, intellectual, and practical quandaries or trickily leads others into them. Plato probably met Socrates in his early or mid-teens, and even then earned the older man's admiration; he would have been sixteen in 408–407 BCE, which appears to have been the year that Socrates undertook to educate Plato's older brother Glaucon in wise political leadership, a conversation

that both Xenophon and Plato record.[4] Xenophon represents Socrates as having struck up the conversation with Glaucon as a favor to Plato, so the latter must by then already have been a regular associate of Socrates.[5]

Plato's record of such a conversation occurs, of course, in the very famous dialogue, *The Republic,* in which Socrates leads Glaucon (and Adeimantus too) through an answer to the question, "What is justice?" Over the course of the conversation, Socrates builds an argument for a utopia led by philosopher-kings and queens and protected by a class of guardian-soldiers, including both men and women, who hold their property in common, have egalitarian gender relations, and enjoy open marriages. But the historian Xenophon also records a conversation between Socrates and Glaucon about political leadership. In a book called *Reminiscences of Socrates,* Xenophon represents the conversation between Socrates and Glaucon as having been unextraordinary *(Mem.* 3.6.1 ff.). According to Xenophon, the wise man asked Plato's brother questions like: "Tell us how you propose to begin your services to the state"; "Will you try to make your city richer?"; "In order to advise the city whom to fight, it is necessary to know the strength of the city and of the enemy… tell us the naval and military strength of our city, and then that of her enemies." Although the questions are conventional, Glaucon fares poorly. So Socrates admonishes him: "Don't you see how risky it is to say or do what you don't understand?"

Plato's involvement with Socrates ended prematurely – even before Plato was out of his twenties. In 399 BCE, the citizens of Athens condemned his teacher to death. Why? Five years earlier, in 404 BCE, the group of oligarchs, among whom Plato's uncles numbered, had taken over the city in an oligarchic coup; Socrates was associated with several of the participants. Within a year, the democratic resistance had in turn overthrown the oligarchs. Admirably, the