



Great Dialogues of Plato

Plato , W.H.D. Rouse , Matthew S. Santirocco

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Written in the form of debates, *Great Dialogues of Plato* comprises the most influential body of philosophy of the Western world—covering every subject from art and beauty to virtue and the nature of love.

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From Reader Review Great Dialogues of Plato for online ebook

D'arcy says

One of, not just of philosophy's cornerstone texts, but of my own personal views. That isn't to say I actually agree or believe everything Plato says (I find many arguments with his 'innate logic' as well as his views on government), but his method and practice are such that few can hold a candle to the eloquence and captivation that Plato wrote with. The Socratic method is a great tool for understanding and discovery, and many texts also develop a great deal of insight into the lives of the times.

Rohan Sohail says

A slow read, this one, especially if you're keen on understanding most, if not all, of what Plato says. interesting ideas; most interesting of all the assessments of the different constitutions that are present in the world, especially the bit about democracy, how the democratic constitution comes into being, what the public is like under it, how a democratic individual is. a definite recommendation for someone looking to take a peak into the world of philosophy.

Nuno says

Long, complicated, boring and brilliant. Plato's thinking influences ideology to this day. Socrates, through Plato, is much like a gymnast doing a dangerous stunt. From the point of view of the viewer (or reader): we are never quite sure how he'll do it, but he always lands it, as Socrates, even in death, and even for his death, always sticks the landing, always (more than winning the argument) finds the truth - the best truth which he can find.

Lynna Kivela says

W.H.D Rouse did a very good job with the translation and made it easy to follow and enjoyable as well. I got this edition out of my local library. I could not help but imagine a place and time where people actually thought, conversed, knew how to have intellectual exchanges with respect and honor, and cared about developing and improving their intellect and the world (or state) in which they lived.

I also learned that Socrates is a character of Plato's. He may or may not have existed. So when someone says that they enjoy reading Socrates, this is inaccurate. What they mean is: they are reading Plato's version of "Socrates."

Reading "Great Dialogues of Plato," made me realize, even more so than usual, what a sad and sociopathic world that we are now living in. People are no longer thinkers and philosophers but seekers of instant attention and gratification; nothing real or meaningful.

Joe Blankenship says

I read this a young, high school level student. Keeping that in mind, the words are clear, concise, and thoughtfully chosen. However, the tragedy of my youth was the lack of understanding and depth to which Plato's idea resonated through time. This philosophy is a great foundation from which to build your cognitive processes keeping in mind that the meaning to many of the passages changes as one ages. It is in this where this sometimes hard to read text shines. I recommend this to all young thinkers, but recommend you take your time with it as it takes some time to digest.

Alex Passey says

Full disclosure, I'm calling it quits only about 150 pages into this. It's not that there is no value to this book, it's just that it only comes from a historical context when I was really in the market for some provocative philosophy. I also didn't care much for the choppy allegorical way that the philosophy came packaged, though I suppose that is the nature of Plato presenting in writing the work of his mainly oratory teacher. While it was neat in the first couple dialogues seeing Socrates laying the groundwork for philosophy for ages to come, there are only so many pages that level of neatness can sustain a book. I suppose it was my bad for not realizing beforehand that Greek philosophy's way of trying to package everything so neatly just to be delivered into the hands of divine explanation would grate on my messy postmodernist sensibilities. I'm sure this book has more value for somebody who has an avid passion for classical Greece, or at least a more avid passion than me anyway.

Aaron White says

Reading Plato's Socrates, is like following a mathematical proof, except the ends are unknown. Arguments are initiated by a question which is often shown to be irrelevant, not always. Then Socrates begins to break the discussion in what seems a totally random direction, coming to temporary conclusions that you heartily disagree with, only to see him discard those through some fancy bit of word wrangling – and bring you mostly around to what you were thinking in the first place. Sometimes. Often, I find myself disagreeing with the conclusions from a practical and theoretical standpoint. Most often, I find myself objecting to points along the way, and linkages that Socrates draws together that I find to be apples and oranges.

These dialogues suffer from yes-men. Every single Socratic discourse is constantly punctuated by someone else: “Yes,” “Of course,” “How could it be otherwise,” “It would seem to be you proved it!” I constantly wanted to jump in and say, “Well, no actually, because....” But of course, Socrates speeches are above reproach.

This aside, I did find some truth, and some things that were close and grasping at truth. In particular, I was enchanted by Plato's conclusions near the end of the republic on the nature of man, particularly as regards pleasure and higher fulfillment and as regards the tyrannical man who is ostensibly free, but in reality a slave to his desires. This man, Plato, in the voice of Socrates, states must be ruled by one who is just and master of himself. Here, Plato and I diverge a bit as I believe all men are not capable of being this just and mastered ruler, though they can succeed to various degrees.

I, often, enjoyed the back and forth, with the objections listed above. Though, in reality, I found very little

practical use. Aside from a resurgence of good speech, and somewhat lost art.

Incidentally, being a Christian and fairly well-read and studied in the Bible and the things thereof, I found in this work fascinating insights into the way people of this time (though written 3 centuries prior, centuries moved slower then) thought: the way the written word carried weight, especially 1 or 2 important works; the way people interacted with the gods; the way people considered the gods and their attributes; among several other things. The parallels and connections in how Jesus would have interacted and been perceived in that time period, including the ways in which he was counter-cultural, I found to be fascinating.

Jay Szpurs says

DONE! Been reading this book for just almost two years!! Faithfulness to the original style and structure of the dialogues is both strength and weakness: it recreates the experience of Socrates' teaching method and creates a compelling narrative by following Socrates through his trial and execution.

Unfortunately, it is also a bit rambling and takes some time getting to the point of a line of questioning. Many anecdotes and turns of phrase are extremely anachronistic (a few are almost incomprehensible even with Rouse's footnotes). No matter the problems with style (which is no reflection on Plato or his translator, but 2500 years of development in written conventions and the laziness of this reader's ear), the ideas under discussion are fascinating and the drama of Socrates' final days is faithfully and powerfully captured.

The Republic's book-by-book summary was invaluable and Rouse's translation is as modern as possible. Great!

Keith Ford says

One of the best greek philosophers.

VC Gan says

This book is well translated and it took me a long time to finish than anticipated. If you read these dialogues, and I mean really read them thoroughly, it will have a profound effect on how you view life and interaction. The only problem is that you really have to want to read and understand it. When you are ready to commit, buy this book, read it, and watch your outlook on how you view life change before your very eyes.

Jacob Aitken says

Some notes:

Symposium

Does Love have an object? Yes. Love has to love something (200c). Unfortunately, this implies desire,

which is a lack. Necessarily, then, Love must love beautiful things.

“justified, true belief.” “To have a right opinion without being able to give a reason is neither to understand nor is it ignorance” (202B).

The nature of spiritual: “for all the spiritual is between divine and mortal” 202c-204c. Love is a great spirit which has causal power. God cannot mingle directly with man but goes through the Forms.

Beauty is simple and we partake of Beauty only by participation (209c-211c). Language of ascent in 211c.

Republic

Book 1

Thrasymachus: Justice is whatever serves the advantage of the stronger. However, he admits that sometimes the Stronger commands the weaker to do what is not in the stronger’s advantage (e.g., when the Stronger unwittingly makes a mistake). Socrates then asks, “What is ‘advantage?’”

The practitioner of an art/scientia never seeks the advantage simply for the sake of the art (healing is not for the sake of healing, but for the body).

Beginning of a definition of justice: a kind of wisdom or virtue (350C-352A)

Book 2

Justice belongs to the noblest class, the soul. Justice is a form which has causal power (358b-360c).

Socrates is rebutting the counterargument that no one is just willingly, but only under compulsion. In responding, Socrates posits several analogues (369c):

Man = city

soul = justice

Theology

God is simple and good, so he is changeless (380a-381d). Things in the best condition are least liable to change. If something undergoes change, then it is being changed by something else (and the lesser doesn’t change the greater).

Book III

Educating to virtue, thus censorship.

A good soul by its own virtues provides a body in the best possible condition (402d-404c).

The better rulers are usually older men (408c).

There is an equivalence between concord--harmony--music--training.

The result of this concord is a soul that is both temperate and brave (410c. passim).

Remember that the individual soul is an analogue to the City.

Plato suggests a communism in regard to the training of Guardians, but we are not yet to a full communism in society (415e).

Book IV

The guardians must guard against all extremes in wealth and poverty, for these lead to idleness (422b). They must maintain the mean between wealth and poverty.

Temperance permeates all of society. It “brings all the strings into concord” (432a).

Moves back to a definition of justice:

to do one’s business and not meddle in affairs (4323-434c).

justice is the presupposition (precondition?) of the other Greek virtues: temperance, courage, intelligence.

multiplicity makes finding justice difficult.

justice maintains the harmony between classes.

We can know justice for a city by looking at a man who maintains this harmony in his soul (435a).

Anthropology

Do we learn by one faculty, feel by another, etc.?

Are the faculties within man simply synonymous or are they distinct?

They are distinct. There is something in the soul that moves towards Logos and another that moves towards the passions (438b-439e).

This is similar to Freud’s “divided mind” theory.

Plato ends Book IV with a suggestion of the 5 faculties. However, Book V is a detour

Book V

Book V is an intricate discussion on the particulars of a philosophical city. Such a city must be unified. Thus,

“So that city is best managed in which the greatest number say “mine” and ‘not mine’ with the same meaning about the same things” (462a-463d)

This sounds a lot like Augustine’s Discussion in Book IXX City of God.

Opposites and One

Since beautiful and ugly are opposites, they are two. And since they are two, each is one. Even though each of these are one, they appear as many because each shows itself everywhere in community (476a). This sounds like Maximus’s Logos/logoi. Collectively, the forms are one but they manifest themselves as many.

Discussions of Nominalism

Is there beauty in itself, or is beauty just a name?

The knower knows something, not nothing. If he knows something, he knows something that is. You can’t know what is not. Further, there is a state between knowledge and ignorance

knowledge = things that are ignorance = things that are not

knowledge is a faculty (Plato calls it a power)

Opinion is between the two; it partakes of both being and non-being. This the realm of Becoming.

Book VI

The “mob mentality” probably can’t separate “The Beautiful” from beautiful things (493e).

Archetype/ectype

“perfect model of the the Good, the use of which makes all just things” (505a-c).

Arche-writing and Trace

The ideals/forms appeal to the mind (507b). Hearing and sound inferior to seeing because they can work if the third term is absent. The following triad

sight---> light ←--color

The ectype is in relation to the archetype by analogy (508).

We have noted that the forms have causal power. Their effects are in the mind.

Hyper-ousia (509b)

The good is the cause that knowledge exists. The Good is not a state of knowledge but something beyond it. Most important sentence in the book.

Alex says

This took me a long time to read, but it’s so dense and is difficult to read in 30 minute chunks on the bus. It’s also not something I would choose to read straight from beginning to end, opting instead to break it up with fiction or other non-fiction books.

I was introduced to Plato and Socrates in first year university; you could say my imagination and critical thinking skills experienced an awakening then. I will always have a special place in my heart for these two indistinguishable philosophers, particularly for the axiom that “the unexamined life is not worth living.”

Reading “The Trial and Death of Socrates” taught me about careful argumentation and rhetoric. It also taught me to question people’s claims and beliefs, and to not accept things at face value. This might sound like hyperbole or a romantic recounting of university, but it’s not: Socrates and Plato had one of the most significant impacts on my young life, and the spirit of inquiry and curiosity they engendered in me has (I hope) carried on to this day.

This collection covers a lot of ground, and it allowed me to rediscover my love of some of these ideas, and to

expand my understanding of Socrates the man and the philosopher. For instance, I learned that Socrates believes that art is a result of divine inspiration. I learned that he revered Homer. And I learned that he believes in the immortality of the soul and that all knowledge is simply recollection. While I don't necessarily agree with all of these ideas, I like to imagine the truth and usefulness of them.

The Republic takes up the bulk of this collection. Admittedly, I had never read it before picking up this collection (for one Canadian dollar at a garage sale, by the way). It's very dense, and I actually found it to be one of the least enjoyable parts of the set, and the one I took most issue with when it came to some of the claims regarding the ideal society. Nevertheless, it was certainly engaging if nothing else.

I could probably say more, but I'll stop and say that if you ever get a chance to study Socrates and Plato in school, do it. It could change your life. Reading these books and dialogues in a vacuum has its own benefits, but their true power comes with fruitful discussion and analysis between curious minds.

Andrew Pixton says

The Dialogues are conversations written by Plato around or about his mentor, Socrates. Socrates is my favorite philosopher for a number of reasons. The word, Philosopher, is a Greek word that literally translates: Lover of Wisdom. It is both a mode of critical thinking and a way of life, and Socrates is philosopher supreme. Plato's cool too, but I wish to know which of these dialogues was Socrates and which Plato. This appears to be in dispute. In any case, this took a long time to read. Classics ramble. But the little gems made it very worth it. Socrates embodies everything I love about philosophy. His sharply inquisitive mind and acute self-awareness. "The unexamined life is not worth living." His humility. "I know that I know nothing." In addition to the tradition of him bowing to a satirical depiction of himself at a play. His words of praise for love in Symposium and extolling Justice in the Republic. All of it incredible in spite of the long speeches, friendliness to Soviet style communism, and absurd lines of reasoning (though not absurd for their time, perhaps). And most particularly his heroic example at the end, of spiritual attainment and graceful submission to an unjust penal system. Here are some more of those gems:

Of course everything in the Allegory of the Cave in the Republic. Possibly the greatest thing ever written. He describes in beautiful language how everyone is sitting in chains at the end of a cave. They can't move, but must watch the wall and the shadows of images projected on it. If we break free of these chains and turn around, we see a fire projecting the shadow images on the wall via ceramic shapes of plants and animals that are moved in front of the flames. But if we then exit the cave, we can view the real world rather than the imitations, or even shadows of imitations. It seems to be both a theory on material forms and a set up for the political structure of their utopia. I have multiple ways to apply or interpret it. In the aforementioned, the outside real world could be atoms, or their deeper components of quarks, muons, and leptons. Or perhaps even strings. Rather than the projected wholes or descriptions of these pieces. In politics, Socrates argues that he who makes it out of the cave will be tempted to stay there and enjoy the comfort and beauty, but he must go back in and free the others. On metaphysics, there is an obvious spiritual path of ascension to greater knowledge, wisdom, awareness, peace, purity, and freedom. Maybe the cave dwellers that watch the wall in modern day are people that watch a lot of tv and believe everything they see. The cave is indeed the crown of the dialogues as most readers will likely agree.

Later, Socrates talks about different forms of government. Of the problems inherent in democracy, oligarchy, tyranny, etc. Most poignant to me is when he mentions the role of money in politics. As the Citizen's United ruling changed the way our democracy works, moving towards the plutocratic oligarchy described here in

book eight seems prophetic. "...according to property when the rich govern and the poor have no share in government... First they invent ways of spending for themselves. Neither they nor their wives obey the law, but they pervert them to support this... They push ahead with their money. The more they value money, the less they value virtue." And the final foresight of what the growing wealth gap will create: "A city of that sort is not one but two of necessity. A city of the rich and city of the poor, living together and always plotting against each other." And then he attributes the high crime rates of the poor to poor education and environment. It then talks about how a dictator will rise up as a savior to a desperate people amidst chaos, that all he needs is an obedient mob. Sound familiar? (Interesting that he uses the word comrades when talking about these mobs).

So Socrates warns about these drones (referring to the bee). People that just do as they are told with no questioning. He says that the ruler of this republic, who has left the cave, must teach them. Basically help them leave the cave as he/she did. We need more leaders like that today. "We think it better to be ruled by the divine and wise, if possible having this as his own within himself... establishing a constitution within himself... Keeping his eyes fixed on the constitution within himself." And notably, he says this noble totalitarianism does not exist on earth, but is in heaven as a model for us. Perhaps like a 'Kingdom of Heaven' emulated as a church here?

His death, a martyrdom, is an inspiring example. Accused to be corrupting the youth and for impiety for not believing in the pantheon of gods. He makes a case that the charges are lies from hypocritical people. But accepts the conviction when sentenced to death. He has the opportunity to escape with his friends, but turns it down because it would accomplish little good and he believes in supporting the justice system. He is not afraid or sad to die in the slightest, convinced he is going to spiritual salvation and immortality of mind where he will be yet more free to think and learn.

Now for some awesome phrases that stood out to me:

"...and all things in the end become immortal."

"For the gods of a surety never neglect one who earnestly desires to be just, and by practicing virtue to become as like God as it is possible for man to be."

"Many thanks for your kindness, gentlemen, but I will obey the god rather than you, and as long as I have breath in me, and am able to do it, I will never cease being a philosopher, and exhorting you."

"All I do is to go about and try to persuade you, both young and old, not to care for your bodies or your monies first, and to care more exceedingly for the soul, to make it as good as possible; and I tell you that virtue comes not from money, but from virtue comes both money and all other good things for mankind, both in private and in public."

"I will never do anything else, even if I am to die many deaths."

"For the state is like a big thoroughbred horse, so big that he is a bit slow and heavy, and wants a gadfly to wake him up. I think the god put me on the state something like that, to wake you up and persuade you and reproach you every one... you will be vexed perhaps, like sleepers being awakened."

"No, gentlemen, the difficult thing is not to escape death, I think, but to escape wickedness."

"For if you believe that by putting men to death you will stop everyone from reproaching you because your

life is wrong, you make a great mistake; for this riddance is neither possible or honorable; but another life is most honorable and most easy, not to cut off lives, but to offer yourselves readily to be made as good as can be. There is my prophecy to those who condemned me and I make an end."

"And now it is time to go, I to die, and you to live; but which of us goes to a better thing is unknown to all but God."

"...if we are not infected with its (our bodies) nature, but keep ourselves pure from it until God himself shall set us free from it. And so, pure and rid of the body's foolishness, we shall be in the company of those like ourselves, and shall know like ourselves complete incontamination, and that perhaps is the truth. But for the impure to grasp the impure, it seems, is not allowed."

"As I say then, lovers of learning understand that philosophy, taking possession of their soul in this state, greatly encourages it and tries to free it, by showing that surveying through the eyes is full of deceit, and so is perception through the ears and other senses; she persuades the soul to withdraw from these, except so far as there is necessity to use them, and exhorts it to collect itself and to gather itself into itself, and to trust nothing at all but itself."

From his contemporary, Simmias: "For I think, as perhaps you do, Socrates, that to know the truth of matters in this present life is impossible, or at least very difficult; but only a very soft man would refuse to test in every way what is said about them and would give up before examining them all over till he was tired out. I think a man's duty is one of two things: either to be taught or to find out where the truth is, or if he cannot, to take the best possible human doctrine and the hardest to disprove, and to ride on this like a raft on the waters of life and to take the risk; unless he could have a more seaworthy vessel to carry him more safely and with less danger, some divine doctrine to bring him through."

"Don't let us be 'misologues', hating arguments as misanthropes hate men; The worst disease one can have is to hate arguments. Misology and misanthropy come in the same way. Misanthropy is put on by believing someone completely without discrimination, and thinking the man to be speaking the truth wholly and wholesomely, and then finding out afterward that he is bad and untrustworthy and quite different."

"Many are called but few are chosen." -A twist on an old Greek saying.

"...but I am conscious that arguments proved from likelihood are humbugs."

"So I thought I must take refuge in reasoning, to examine the truth of the realities."

David says

A good translation. Includes The Apology, The Republic, Symposium, Crito, Phaedo, Meno, and Ion. The first two are a must read for everyone. The Republic takes some work getting through, but it is worth it.

Maureen says

From *Meno*, the dialogue between Socrates and Menon:

"Menon: And how will you try to find out something, Socrates, when you have no notion at all what it is? Will you lay out before us a thing you don't know, and then try to find it? Or, if at best you meet it by chance, how will you know this is that which you did not know?"

...(nine pages later)...

Socrates: Yes, I think that I argue well, Menon. I would not be confident in everything I say about the argument; but one thing I would fight for to the end, both in word and deed if I were able - that if we believed that we must try to find out what is not known, we should be better and braver and less idle than if we believed that what we do not know it is impossible to find out and that we need not even try." p.51

Too bad we don't use the Socratic method anymore. This book rocks.
