



The Dialogues of Plato

Plato, Erich Segal (Introduction by), Benjamin Jowett

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"The unexamined life is not worth living." Socrates's ancient words are still true, and the ideas sounded in Plato's "Dialogues" still form the foundation of a thinking person's education. This superb collection contains excellent contemporary translations selected for their clarity and accessibility to today's reader, as well as an incisive introduction by Erich Segal, which reveals Plato's life and clarifies the philosophical issues examined in each dialogue. The first four dialogues recount the trial execution of Socrates--the extraordinary tragedy that changed Plato's life and so altered the course of Western thought. Other dialogues create a rich tableau of intellectual life in Athens in the fourth century B.C., and examine the nature of virtue and love, knowledge and truth, society and the individual. Resounding with the humor and astounding brilliance of Socrates, the immortal iconoclast, these great works remain powerful, probing, and essential.

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From Reader Review The Dialogues of Plato for online ebook

ROHIT RAWAT says

Teaches you [how] to question day to day life events. I would recommend this to every philosophy reader.

Hoonie says

I will read you next time again
the begin The book was interesting, but again and again, It takes much time to read this book, Sorry Plato

Shane says

Difficult to get through at points, but a good reminder that not much has changed in terms if human society.
Also interesting that some of the themes of myths told by socrates are being verified by science today.

Ronnie Winterton says

I love catching up on the classic philosophers from time to time, and Plato's dialogues are some of the best. They are surprisingly accessible and address some of life's greatest questions. When reading these it's easy to see why early Christian writers drew from Plato because he spends a lot of time trying to address absolute truth and skepticism.

Although sometimes these dialogues can be really hard to follow, and we don't fully subscribe to Plato's theory of the Forms today, these are very useful for anybody trying to think about life's greatest questions.

Braeden Giacconi says

My edition of Plato's dialogues included the Apology, Crito, Symposium, Phaedo, and parts of the Republic. Plato's work is easily the most important to Western civilization next to maybe the Bible (depending on who you ask), so I read it. The Dialogues are kind of frustrating. The Apology is just Socrates talking about the trial, and in my opinion there isn't that much philosophical merit to it. Then the Crito is Socrates's friend trying to convince him to escape from jail (I don't remember how), and then Socrates telling Crito why that is bad (which I disagreed with, like REALLY Socrates, it is so important for you to be submissive in perpetuating an obviously bogus 'justice' system that punishes people that other people don't like??). Finally, the Symposium is a bunch of drunk people talking about love, and it's probably the most lighthearted of all of them. Don't take the Symposium too seriously, one of the people who gives the most famous line (the one about how we are all searching for our other half) is a comedian of Greece..so its kind of you choice how you interpret the Symposium.

My big problem with the Dialogues is the way that Socrates formulates arguments. Its just so repetitive, here's how it works.

Socrates: (Makes claim)

Random person: (Disagrees)

Socrates: (Asks a bunch of logical questions that one cannot say no to)

Random person: (Says an alternating line up of 'yes', 'that must be certain', etc.)

Socrates: (Makes that person agree with his argument)

Really the only serious purpose of these Dialogues is that you are constantly arguing with Socrates in your head. His arguments are REALLY loose and easy to poke holes in. I actually do think he has a lot of great philosophy and his contributions to the world are significant and worthy, but some of it is a little ridiculous.

Doug says

"The easiest and the noblest way is not to be crushing others, but to be improving yourselves."

It's interesting to think that political correctness existed so far back in the past and that it still is here today. it's a long running rule that will always be broken. it's a long running tool used as an excuse to condemn people who otherwise there would be nothing to condemn them with.

I wonder what Socrates would say... being that the attempt to destroy others still continues. And that instead of being sentenced to death like was done to him, political correctness today is meant to wear down one's soul and ideas instead.

Rae says

I have always been interested in philosophy...took a few classes in college and did a little of my own research just because it peaks my interest but I am by no means an expert whatsoever. That being said I feel slightly incapable of writing a review on such an "epic" book if you will. My reading comprehension skills are not top notch, but decent. For me this book was sometimes easy to understand and sometimes very difficult. During the difficult parts I would google cliff's notes so I could try to gain a better understanding. I believe when you read philosophy it is very important to focus and try to understand what the author was trying to get across as best as possible. That means researching the history, context, theme, etc. so it can be a little tedious.

Time spent reading and studying this book for me really paid off as I get a "rush" so to speak from wrapping my mind around different ideas, concepts, and schools of thought while attempting to sync them with other philosophical/religious theories as well as science theories. The Dialogues of Plato tell the stories of Socrates' thoughts and reflections in a way that is vivid, entertaining, and thought-provoking. Friendly conversation really does seem the best way to open minds, including your own.

Personally I think everyone should read this book, but I know many people would find it a little boring and uneventful if they are used to high-action, sexy novels. If you can dedicate the time and energy into it it will really open your mind, which is always a good thing! I am working to keep Philosophy alive in the best way

I can!

Gerald Jerome says

This is a decent compilation and intro to some of Plato's dialogues, though *The Republic* has been reduced to some of its truncated and finer points. One may not always agree with its conclusions, but the most important thing is that the question was raised. The Socratic method is certainly a worthwhile tool for educating one's self as well as cultivating understanding in others. Even so, as evidenced in these dialogues, it can be easily misapplied (assuming that an objective truth is the goal and not persuasion). These dialogues are best read as a consideration of the ideas themselves, the method used to reach them, and the literary mode in which they are delivered. Appraisals beyond this, step into a murky territory.

It's difficult to separate how much of this is the true words of Socrates and how much Plato is using a fictional Socrates to espouse his own views. There's also the issue of Plato's idolization of Socrates, as well as the idolatry of Socrates' interlocutors (whether in truth or fiction). They seem all too eager to agree with Socrates and frequently continue further that there is no possible alternative to his conclusions. This may be due in part to the flawed and closed manner in which Socrates often presents his case.

What we see unfold before us is actually an illusion of dialogue. The opportunity for contribution is often a request by Socrates for yea or nay of an irrefutably true statement. However, this statement is often conveniently appended to a previous line of allegations. When answering "yea" to the final conclusion, one affirms all that came before it. The loaded question is just one of many rhetorical (and fallacious or misleading) devices employed throughout the dialogues. There is also the false analogy in which two scenarios or concepts are presented to be more alike than they actually are. Often times in the longest of Socrates' arguments, you will find that he draws the point of an assertion so far out in a string of abstractions until the original form of the argument is no longer recognizable and can therefore be easily refuted or supported (depending upon the need of the moment). His humility and nobility in all of this is sometimes brought into question, as it may be wondered whether he was aware of his misleading manner or if he himself was fooled through such convolution.

It is apt that Socrates was so occupied by opposites, as he is the fool that is enlightened and the following interrogator that guides through inquiry. Socrates often claims to be wise from his reverence for his ignorance, though there is the sense that he utilizes a feigned humility as a masked outlet for elitism. His questions are more akin to a breadcrumb trail of assertions, leading the interrogated participant to what he already believes to be right. Socrates wins arguments not of logic, but of words. It's interesting that both he and Plato attempt to remove themselves from sophistry when so much of such tactics seem to be embedded in their work. Perhaps these dialogues are better viewed as a transitory step from sophistry into something greater.

All in all, it is a gripping read, both dramatically and philosophically. Many core beliefs commonly taken for granted are explored and there are some really interesting and thought-provoking conclusions reached. These dialogues help to foster appreciation of the art of inquiry, as well as the dark side of cross-examination. Witnessing how so many "foundational truths" (themselves shaped by contemporary values and beliefs), were taken as self-evident by a group of learned thinkers can broaden the self-awareness of the modern reader. Many a difficult subject was tackled and there was more done in these dialogues than many can claim to have penetrated within their daily meditations. It is understandable that such early prodding would meet eventual criticism and it should not take away from its contributions to future thought. I may sound like I

gripe a lot about Socrates but I feel that people are so enamored by his notoriety and impact on thought that they overlook the ostensible purpose of his questioning: to think critically for one's self and ask questions against what one assumes to be true. Even Socrates' arguments should not be taken for granted. In closing, I think Adeimantus summed it up best (minus the part about philosophers being useless):

"To these statements, Socrates, no one can offer a reply; but when you talk in this way, a strange feeling passes over the minds of your hearers: They fancy that they are led astray a little at each step in the argument, owing to their own want of skill in asking and answering questions; these littles accumulate, and at the end of the discussion they are found to have sustained a mighty overthrow and all their former notions appear to be turned upside down. And as unskilful players of draughts are at last shut up by their more skilful adversaries and have no piece to move, so they too find themselves shut up at last; for they have nothing to say in this new game of which words are the counters; and yet all the time they are in the right. The observation is suggested to me by what is now occurring. For any one of us might say, that although in words he is not able to meet you at each step of the argument, he sees as a fact that the votaries of philosophy, when they carry on the study, not only in youth as a part of education, but as the pursuit of their maturer years, most of them become strange monsters, not to say utter rogues, and that those who may be considered the best of them are made useless to the world by the very study which you extol. " - The Republic

JP says

Contains Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Protagoras, Meno, Symposium, and Gorgias. In general, these are considered the primary component of Plato's early works, in which he expounds that learned from his teacher Socrates. The arguments seem somewhat simplistic by today's standards, but the style and logic clearly represent the timeless fame rendered to Socrates. In Apology, Socrates willingly accepts indictment and makes his argument. True to his spirit, he makes adequate defense against both classes of charges but is still found guilty. In arguing his case, he brings out the idea that he is "wise" because he knows he is not and questions every principle proposed to him. In Crito, he also expresses that he wishes the mass could do bad for then they could also do good. Phaedo is moving in the way he willingly accepts his execution, explaining to his followers that a philosopher dedicates their entire life to separating body from soul. He considers it completely natural to follow what the law of society has ordained and does not fear his death but rather looks toward it. In Protagoras, Socrates debates with the former regarding why his young friend should follow Protagoras to learn Virtue. They explore exactly what that is and isn't and Socrates successfully impugns the self-proclaimed value of the Sophists' claim to profess teaching it. His analogy to merchants and their selling of wares without knowing what is good and bad for their customers makes one immediately think of so many modern "improvements." Hippocrates is also present at these debates. Meno involves constant debate regarding virtue. The final conclusion is that it comes from the Divine but must be defined before it can be better understood. In Symposium, Socrates joins in an after-dinner discussion to eulogize Eros. Several mythological concepts are introduced there: the belief in two Aphrodite's (one being true love and one Pandium), the original human with twice as many of most parts (split by the gods to limit their arrogance and always searching for their pairs; the love is actually a search for immortality through reproduction, or a better society, et al). In Gorgias, Socrates debates the value of rhetoric. (Great phrase ascribed to Callicles: mad with eloquence, like a true politician). Judgment is portrayed as having originally (time of Cronos) been performed by "clothed" men on "clothed men, resulting in a superficial judgment as the dead were sent down one of two roads. To summarize the conclusions, rhetoric is in itself useless (or at least no more than any other skill) and an increase in power is also an increase in ability to sin. Socrates also compared trials of ideas to a trial of a doctor vs a candy maker with a jury composed of children.

R de la Lanza says

Escribí el prólogo de esta edición.

Sowmya says

It seems the ‘Dialogues of Plato’, is one of the few official accounts of Socrates’ philosophies. Socrates obviously had no paucity of brains. His peers in Athens knew that well and most revered him and sought his valuable thoughts, bought his arguments and honoured him as an elite philosopher. Yet, the mighty prevailed.

Reading this book, made me realize how some things never change. Might is right and if you are no Socrates, your principles somehow evolve to mirror those of the ‘mighty’ or the more powerful proponents of a society.

While I caught snippets of what Socrates believed and argued to this deathbed now and then, this is the first time I actually sat down and read him (or Plato). This part of the book recounts the dialogues with his closest circle who sat with him in his cell, hours before he was executed and all they did was either talk him into escaping or discuss his beliefs further.

The most interesting is the one of the transient soul. That was the one Socrates was most opposed over. He apparently did not believe in the immortal soul. A soul that travels eventually has to wear out and die which he tries to prove with good examples.

In the Symposium the discussion about what love is, and about the different kinds of love introduces the idea of platonic love. While the musings on the kind of love felt by men for youths is interesting especially as they keenly argue the difference between the kind of affection here and that of the erotic attraction felt by homosexuals, Diotima’s take on the more general kind of love is also worth following ,wordy and really lengthy for a third person account as Socrates is the one who recounts an earlier discussion he had with her in this all male debate, but worth a contemplative read over.

Funny, is the way Socrates is held up to be some kind of a demi God.

The writing style is ancient though and made me want to drink poison too, halfway through the book! Here’s a conversation that Socrates, I’m sure, wished he’d had.

Socrates: All drinks that do not satisfy thirst are useless and add no value.

His student (any one of them): Yes that is so

Socrates: following the same discussion, Wine beyond a certain limit adds no value

His Student: That would have to be

Socrates: Water too can be said to possess similar qualities

His student: Of course

Socrates: Then water and wine can be in some situations, equal

His student: Without a doubt Socrates and following your earlier argument it would have to hold

Socrates: And what of poison then?

His Student: What of it Socrates?

Socrates: Is it also not of any value beyond a certain limit?

His Student: yes that is a fact.

Socrates: Since I can hold wine beyond a limit and not feel drunk, I should also be able to hold water and by the same argument poison.

His Student: Yes Socrates! Why did we not see this! We should have requested 6 cups of poison instead of one!

I am yet to read 'Republic'.

Manny says

I couldn't possibly write a review of this. Even a short book would not do it justice.

Mark says

Socrates says "The unexamined life is not worth living." Yet this book actually shows that an examined dialogue is not worth believing. The general format of the Socratic dialogues is:

Socrates: Incorrect fact #1.

Friend: Obviously, Socrates.

Socrates: Correct fact #2.

Friend: Of course, Socrates.

Socrates: $1 + 2 = 3$. And a half.

Friend: You are so wise Socrates.

Since the arguments are so blatantly made up, it is hard to give any credence to the conclusions. Which is a shame because he espouses some noble sentiments. Maybe the book would be more successful if it showed Socrates living his principles rather than blathering on about them. As it is, the book is really only useful for a discussion of different types of logical fallacies. Suggested new title: "How to Lie with Rhetoric".

Ken Ryu says

This books has 5 sections. Apology - Crito - Phaedo - Symposium - Republic (excerpts - about 1/3 of the full version).

Apology: Trial of Socrates. In "Apology", Plato presents Socrates' self-defense argument during his controversial trial. Socrates is accused of corruption and teaching subversive behavior. He denies the charges. When given an opportunity for a plea bargain, he refuses to plead guilty. He would rather die than admit to wrongdoing that he is innocent of.

Crito: With his death sentence hours away, Crito and others visit Socrates in jail. They beg him to allow them to bust his out of jail, but he refuses. He has already stated at his trial that he would rather die than admit guilt. By attempting to avoid the sentence he has publicly accepted, he would be guilty of hypocrisy. He prefers to die with honor.

Phaedo: Socrates is visited by his friends while awaiting the poison hemlock which will complete his death sentence. He is calm despite his imminent death. He believes in the afterlife. He argues that the soul is immortal and the body is solely a vessel. When a child is born, they have an innate understanding of human nature. This must be due to the fact that an immortal soul is within them. If a child is born with an immortal soul, Socrates argues that it is logical to believe the soul lives on when the body dies. Towards the end of the dialogue, there is discussion about the physical earth, heaven, and the Greek gods which are anachronistic and hurt the proof of the argument.

Symposium: Socrates talks of love. Love is the oldest of the gods and the greatest purpose of life.

Republic: The Republic is the most formal and practical of the dialogues. In the Republic, Socrates calls for:

1. Education of the arts (music) and sports (gymnastics). With too much emphasis on music, the person becomes too effeminate, while only drilling in exercise makes one overly boorish.
2. To each according to his own ability. Plato calls for a separation of tasks to take advantage of the inherent skills of individuals.
3. A state should be lead by a philosopher ruler. A philosopher is one who is constantly seeking knowledge and ever curious. Only with these enlightened leaders will a state thrive.
4. Gender equality. Plato believes that a society thrives best when allowing both women and men to serve in any capacity, so long as they are skilled to handle the work.

Much of Plato's ideals are logical and can be applied today. Enlightened leaders, the value of education, the value of arts and physical exercise, gender equality, the good of the state and the good of its citizens being symbiotic, that each individual has unique skills and callings are valid for today's modern society. This book, which has only 1/3 of "The Republic" is concise. Yet most of the ideals can be interpreted loosely. In "The Republic", the gender equality and education is straightforward, but the concept of the philosopher king or ruler is less well defined. What exactly are the ways to measure and certify a "philosopher king" is open to interpretation. The argument about the immortality of the soul has some shaky logic that requires Hades and the Greek gods to be a truism for the proof to hold. Socrates passive resistance to his injustice has a Ghandi/MLK feel to it. What Plato, or for that matter Socrates, really believes and would think of today's issues cannot be fully guessed, though in general the thoughts and ideals are presented in an understandable format.

Plato earns his credit due to his insight into the dialectic process, his compelling argument regarding the immortal soul, and especially his foundational principles on crafting a lasting and successful state. One of the more interesting aspects of Plato's work is that he speaks as the interpreter of Socrates, much in the way that Paul speaks of Jesus. The martyrdom of these two historical figures and their subsequent doctrines being interpreted by their disciples/students have interesting parallels. There are many that praise the wisdom of Socrates and Plato, and they also have a fair share of detractors. Plato takes on a number of lofty and

complex topics, so that he should have admirers and critics is little surprise. Despite finding some examples unconvincing, in general I found most of the ideals, especially in "The Republic" to be sound and logical.

Mike says

These dialogues are the foundation of Western thought: justice, virtue, sex, death, wisdom, folly....it's all here. Plato's Socrates is clever and confounding, ingenious and insufferable. Sometimes, he is sarcastic and smarmy to the point where you can't stand him. At other times, he sounds as lacking in wisdom as he pretends to be. But then he will turn around and offer a startling perspective that will make you admire him. Although familiar with the content of many of these dialogues, I'm glad I waited until I was a little older (i.e. not in college) to read them in full, so as to have both a solid knowledge base of ideas that came after Plato (the later writers and works influenced by these dialogues), but also to have some life experiences under my belt, as these dialogues are more about drawing from practical living experiences than abstract thought experiments. My only minor quibble with the Bantam edition is providing an edited version of Gorgias, but I was able to find the complete dialogue elsewhere, so no big deal there. As it stands, these are great, readable translations of the most essential of Plato's dialogues.
