REPUBLIC

Plato

BARNES & NOBLE CLASSICS

Introduction and Notes by
Elizabeth Watson Scharffenberger
Translated by Benjamin Jowett

more the pleasures of the body fade away, the greater to me are the pleasure and charm of conversation. Do not, then, deny my request, but make our house your resort and keep company with these young men; we are old friends, and you will be quite at home with us.

I replied: There is nothing which for my part I like better, Cephalus, than conversing with aged men; for I regard them as e
travellers who have gone a journey which I too may have to go, and of whom I ought to inquire whether the way is smooth and easy or rugged and difficult. And this is a question which I should like to ask of you, who have arrived at that time which the poets call the "threshold of old age":* Is life harder toward the end, or what report do you give of it?

I will tell you, Socrates, he said, what my own feeling is. Men of 329
my age flock together; we are birds of a feather, as the old proverb says;† and at our meetings the tale of my acquaintance commonly is. I cannot eat, I cannot drink; the pleasures of youth and love are fled away; there was a good time once, but now that is gone, and life is no longer life. Some complain of the slights which are put b
upon them by relations, and they will tell you sadly of how many evils their old age is the cause. But to me, Socrates, these complainers seem to blame that which is not really in fault. For if old age were the cause, I too, being old, and every other old man would have felt as they do. But this is not my own experience, nor that of others whom I have known. How well I remember the aged poet Sophocles,‡ when in answer to the question, How does love suit with age, Sophocles—are you still the man you were? c
Peace, he replied; most gladly have I escaped the thing of which you speak; I feel as if I had escaped from a mad and furious master. His words have often occurred to my mind since, and they seem as good to me now as at the time when he uttered them. For certainly old age has a great sense of calm and freedom; when the

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*The phrase evokes the Homeric poems; compare *Iliad* 22.60 and 24.487, and *Odyssey* 15.246.

†Literally, "we who are approximately the same age often come to the same place."

‡Athenian tragedian (c.496–406 B.C.E.), active as a playwright until his death.

BOOK 1

SPEAKERS*

SOCRATES	CEPHALUS
GLAUCON	THRASYMACHUS
ADEIMANTUS	CLEITOPHON
POLEMARCHUS	

I WENT DOWN YESTERDAY to the Piræus† with Glaucon, the son of Ariston, that I might offer up my prayers to the goddess;‡ and also because I wanted to see in what manner they would celebrate the festival, which was a new thing. I was delighted with the procession of the inhabitants; but that of the Thracians was equally, if not more, beautiful. When we had finished our prayers and viewed the spectacle, we turned in the direction of the city; and at that instant Polemarchus, the son of Cephalus, chanced to catch sight of us from a distance as we were starting on our way home, and told his slave to run and bid us wait for him. The slave took hold of me by the cloak behind, and said, Polemarchus desires you to wait.

I turned round, and asked him where his master was.

There he is, said the slave, coming after you, if you will only wait.

Certainly we will, said Glaucon; and in a few minutes Polemarchus appeared, and with him Adeimantus, Glaucon's brother, Niceratus, the son of Nicias, and several others who had been at the procession.

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*Information about Socrates, Thrasymachus, and other interlocutors in *Republic* is given in the introduction.

†The major port city of Attica, about 4 miles from Athens.

‡The Thracian deity Bendis, identified by Greeks with the goddess Artemis. The cult of Bendis was officially accepted in Piraeus in 430 or 429 B.C.E.

Polemarchus said to me, I perceive, Socrates, that you and your companion are already on your way to the city.

You are not far wrong, I said.

But do you see, he rejoined, how many we are?

Of course.

And are you stronger than all these? for if not, you will have to remain where you are.

May there not be the alternative, I said, that we may persuade you to let us go?

But can you persuade us, if we refuse to listen to you? he said.

Certainly not, replied Glaucon.

Then we are not going to listen; of that you may be assured.

328 Adeimantus added: Has no one told you of the torch-race on horseback in honor of the goddess which will take place in the evening?

With horses! I replied. That is a novelty. Will horsemen carry torches and pass them one to another during the race?

Yes, said Polemarchus; and not only so, but a festival will be celebrated at night, which you certainly ought to see. Let us rise soon after supper and see this festival; there will be a gathering of b young men, and we will have a good talk. Stay then, and do not be perverse.

Glaucon said, I suppose, since you insist, that we must.

Very good, I replied.

Accordingly we went with Polemarchus to his house; and there we found his brothers Lysias and Euthydemus, and with them Thrasymachus the Chalcedonian, Charmantides the Pæanian, and Cleitophon, the son of Aristonymus. There too was Cephalus, the father of Polemarchus, whom I had not seen for a long time, and I c thought him very much aged. He was seated on a cushioned chair, and had a garland on his head, for he had been sacrificing in the court; and there were some other chairs in the room arranged in a semicircle, upon which we sat down by him. He saluted me eagerly, and then he said:

You don't come to see me, Socrates, as often as you ought: If I were still able to go and see you I would not ask you to come to me. But at my age I can hardly get to the city, and therefore you d should come oftener to the Piræus. For, let me tell you that the

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One of the greatest works of philosophy, political theory, and literature ever produced, Plato's *Republic* has shaped Western thought for thousands of years and remains as relevant today as when it was written during the fourth century B.C.

Republic begins by posing a central question: "What is justice, and why should we be just, especially when the wicked often seem happier and more successful?" For Plato, the answer lies with the ways people, groups, and institutions organize and behave. A brilliant inquiry into the problems of constructing the perfect state and the roles education, the arts, family, and religion should play in our lives, *Republic* employs picturesque settings, sharply outlined characters, and conversational dialogue to drive home the philosopher's provocative arguments.

Elizabeth Watson Scharffenberger holds degrees from the University of Chicago and Columbia University. A specialist in the culture and literature of Athens during the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., she teaches at Columbia University and New York University's Gallatin School.

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