
Review Article: Recent Translations of the *Republic*

RICHARD POLT
Xavier University

Republic, translated by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [first published 1993]), lxxii + 475 pp., \$10 pbk. 978-0-19-283370-9.

The Republic, edited by G. R. F. Ferrari, translated by Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), xlviii + 382 pp., \$12 pbk. 0-521-48443-X.

Republic, translated from the New Standard Greek Text, with Introduction, by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), xxxiv + 358 pp., \$10 pbk. 0-87220-736-6.

The Republic, translated and with an introduction by R. E. Allen (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), xxviii + 369 pp., \$35 h.c. 0-300-11451-6.

Republic, translation, glossary, and introductory essay by Joe Sachs, with an Afterword by John White (Newburyport, Mass.: Focus, 2007), 358 pp., \$15 pbk. 978-1-58510-261-7.

It's hard to imagine a better text than the *Republic* as an introduction to philosophy—or, in fact, as food for thought for anyone. Here Plato sketches an ethics of reason, explores the forms, and introduces political questions from communism to feminism that are permanently relevant. But for almost all our students, these ideas have to be made available in English—and we have never had so many translations from which to choose. Nineteenth-century versions by John Llewelyn Davies and David J. Vaughan, Thomas Taylor, and Benjamin Jowett are in the public domain and readily available both in print and (in Jowett's case) online. Mid-twentieth-century renditions by F. M. Cornford, Paul Shorey, A. D. Lindsay, and H. D. P. (Desmond) Lee are still in print. The translations of a generation ago include those by Allan Bloom (1968) and G. M. A. Grube (1974). Bloom's word-for-word

approach has its devotees and detractors; his edition is also known for its extensive Straussian interpretive essay that foreshadows Bloom's adventures as cultural critic in the late 1980s. Grube's is a readable text that helped to establish Hackett Publishing Company as a source of great philosophical works for classroom use; it was revised by C. D. C. Reeve in 1992.

We now have a fresh crop of efforts to consider, including a wholly new version by Reeve. Three new translations have been published since 2004 alone, two of which (Reeve and Sachs) are based on the new Greek edition edited by S. R. Slings (Oxford, 2003). (As Sachs puts it [14–15], Slings produces “a slight resettling of the ground beneath our feet” as compared to the 1902 Burnet edition, but “most of the textual points in dispute are so small that they will be invisible to the reader.”)

As Socrates says, he and his friends build a *polis* in *logos* to serve as a model of justice (369c): “a city . . . in our speech” (Sachs), “in our discussion” (Reeve), “in discourse” (Allen)—“a hypothetical city” (Griffith), a “theoretical community” (Waterfield). Our theorizing takes place in speech; *logos* is, at least in part, linguistic, so the need to find the best translation cannot be overestimated. There are clear differences among the five latest versions, which run the gamut from contemporary and colloquial to painstakingly literal. Which are most likely to suit our teaching needs? Having often taught the *Republic* to freshmen and sophomores who are encountering philosophy for the first time, I will consider the recent translations with a view to classroom use at an introductory level, but also with a view to their use by more advanced students and scholars. I propose some general principles for selecting a translation, summarize the contents and characteristics of the five recent versions, and compare their renditions of a few key passages.

Some Principles

All translations have to negotiate the perennial tension between two worthy goals: accuracy and readability. Especially for the average American freshman, who often has never read any ancient texts and can be dizzied by arguments with more than two premises, it is essential that the book be accessible—in other words, that a first reading offers some intelligible content and speaks, to some extent, in the student's own language. But we also want the text to be serviceable for a second and third reading under the guidance of an expert—a scrutiny that uncovers nuances and deeper questions. Fidelity to the Greek becomes more important as we trace the use of certain terms or look closely at particular arguments.

For these purposes, and for students with better than average reading skills, there is much to be said for a nearly verbatim translation such as Bloom's. Of course, as Reeve says in the preface to his revision of Grube, "one and the same Greek word may have many different meanings, and different Greek words may have the same meaning." But perhaps, as Bloom points out in his own preface, careful readers can be "enabled to discover the subtleties of the elusive original" only through "a slavish, even if sometimes cumbersome, literalness." The very awkwardness of such a translation is sometimes an advantage: it forces us to dwell on ideas that we should not assume we already understand, and not to prejudge the question of which meanings differ and which are the same. Even those who find that Bloom goes too far in this direction should read his criticism of Cornford's loose, modernizing approach.

We should also beware of making the diction so contemporary that it is anachronistic. A translation does not have to strain to make connections to our own world; such connections can easily be made in class, perhaps with the aid of some films. (Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors* is excellent for the ethical questions. For some political questions I recommend *A State of Mind*, a 2004 documentary on North Korean gymnasts.)

As for particular key terms, we usually want to make it possible for our better students to read research on the *Republic* and see the text's connections to the broader history of philosophy; these are reasons to use caution in departing from tradition. For example, contemporary philosophers and psychologists investigating emotion and desire usually leave talk of the "soul" to religion, and instead speak of the "mind," "personality," or "psyche"—Plato's own word. But the translation of *psychē* as "soul" connects to existing scholarship on Plato, to centuries of English-language philosophy, to Descartes's *Passions de l'Âme*, and to medieval commentaries on Aristotle's *De Anima*. There are advantages, then, to keeping the word "soul," while giving students appropriate caveats.

Finally, we should remember that the *Republic* is not a straightforward exposition of Plato's theories; it is a web of provocations, tensions, and suggestions. Its narrator, Socrates, makes dubious arguments, cracks jokes, reverses himself, expresses doubts, refuses to state his opinions on crucial topics, and is challenged again and again by questions that move the dialogue in new directions. The book has beauty and unity, but not the consistency of a treatise. Whether or not one subscribes to some particular theory of esoteric writing, there is good reason to be suspicious of any claims that "Plato believes x," "Plato argues y," or "Plato commits fallacy z." A translation should not interfere with Plato's tricks and turns, and its notes and introduction should not create the expectation that we can discern his views in any direct way.

Characteristics of the Recent Translations

Waterfield (1993): Aiming at “readable and fluent” English (vii), this version is not afraid to depart from tradition. *Polis* is not “city” but “community,” *psychē* is not “soul” but “mind,” *eidos* is not “form” but “type” (see 414), and *dikaiosunē* is not “justice” but “morality.” This last choice has its grounds: as Reeve puts it in his glossary, the Greek term is “often broader in scope than our notion of justice and more nearly equivalent to ethical rightness in general.” Waterfield claims that “justice” is too narrow because it “means (roughly) ‘acting fairly and impartially towards others’” (xii). As we will see, though, “morality” brings some problems with it, too; and surely we do speak of just and unjust people and political systems, not only actions.

Waterfield’s fifty-two-page introduction distinguishes between “hard” and “soft” aspects of the *Republic*, by which he means explicit and implicit senses (xv) but also politics and psychology (xvi); he holds that most of the explicitly political ideas are implicitly psychological (xviii–xx). He consistently identifies Socrates’ claims with Plato’s own opinions, and is confident that we can know what Plato believed: for instance, we can identify Plato’s goal as “assimilation to God” (xxi), and “[t]here can be no possible grounds for doubting that Plato believed in all the ingredients of the myth” of Er (371; but cf. *Phaedo* 114d). In the usual analytic fashion, then, Waterfield devotes himself to reconstructing Plato’s doctrines. He assumes that the reasoning in the text is intended to be coherent and plausible, so that it is not meant to be supplemented with “lengthy gap-filling arguments”; but we do have to supply some common Greek assumptions that Plato silently followed (xl). Of course, we ourselves may not share these assumptions, and in fact Waterfield claims that today we understand many things better than Plato did: our psychology is far more advanced (xix), and our neurology explains “how ideas can cause actions” (xlii).

Waterfield’s style in the translation is lively and contemporary, sometimes thanks to some pretty free dealings with the Greek. But what may seem like loose renditions are often interesting choices that are worth taking seriously; for example, the word *katoikizein* in Socrates’ crucial statement at 592b is legitimately translated here as “return from exile,” while most translators interpret it as “founding” a city within one’s own soul.

The traditional division into ten books has been replaced with fourteen “chapters” titled by Waterfield. He summarizes and comments on the text in italicized paragraphs that appear every few pages, often making rather strong interpretive claims. Some readers will find this intrusive, and will wish that the analysis had been presented as a separate synopsis, as in Griffith and Reeve, or only at the beginning of each book, as in Sachs.

A ten-page bibliography covers a fairly broad range of English-language scholarship, praising Julia Annas's *An Introduction to Plato's "Republic"* as the "single most important book" on the topic. There are eighty pages of endnotes where, in addition to helpfully explaining allusions, Waterfield provides a considerable amount of philosophical analysis—for example, charging Plato with "equivocat[ing] between the functional and the moral senses of 'good'" (382) and committing the "error" of "immediately specif[ying] morality as an element of goodness" (401). Waterfield also supplies two pages of notes on disputed Greek passages and a seven-page index of names. In a curious choice, he also includes a translation of the possibly spurious *Cleitophon*. There is no subject index.

Griffith (2000): Another smooth and readable version. As Griffith explains, he is "not a professional Plato scholar" (vii), but he worked closely with G. R. F. Ferrari, who indeed is one: his *City and Soul in Plato's "Republic"* (University of Chicago Press, 2005) is a model of elegant and informed argument. Ferrari's twenty-one-page introduction skillfully combines historical and conceptual analysis, arguing that Plato was "fully enmeshed in the controversies of his time" and that this very fact gives his writing vitality today (xxii). The unusually rich historical part of the introduction focuses on the Peloponnesian War, the oligarchy of the Thirty, and the writings of Aristophanes, Xenophon, and Isocrates. Ferrari's philosophical analysis explores the parallel between city and soul and the education of the philosopher-kings, explaining why the *Republic* can be read either as a political utopia or as a "counter-political" work (xxv).

Griffith's translation aims above all to make the dialogue "sound like a conversation" held in English (vii), and it succeeds. This is a version that can be read out loud without ridicule, and often sounds colloquial without being anachronistic: "And will the next step be war, Glaucon? Or what?" (373e). Griffith does not believe in absolute consistency: *aretē* is sometimes "excellence" rather than "virtue," and *eidōs* and *idea* are both sometimes translated as "form," sometimes as "form or character" (both decisions are explained in notes). Although Griffith's choices are much closer to tradition than Waterfield's, he does not mind innovating for the sake of straightforward diction: his Thrasymachus defines justice as "what is good for the stronger" (338c), instead of the traditional but somewhat cryptic "the advantage of the stronger." (The fact that this passage does not use the word that means "the good" in Book VI, *agathon*, does not bother Griffith.) Griffith also fleshes out certain Greek turns of phrase and makes them sound more familiar: what would literally be "believing the things that are" becomes "having a belief which agrees with the way things are" (413a).

Three hundred sixty-five footnotes helpfully anticipate a variety of questions that readers might have. A wide-ranging and well-balanced six-page annotated bibliography offers many opportunities for further research. Other features include a three-page chronology of Plato's life and times; a seven-page synopsis that clearly lays out the main points in the dialogue, with copious Stephanus references; a twenty-two-page glossary focusing on names; and a fifteen-page index. The speakers are listed at the top of each page.

Reeve (2004): Having revised the Grube translation in 1992, C. D. C. Reeve comes into his own with this version of Hackett's "flagship text" (viii). In a nineteen-page introduction, Reeve provides a good, quick account of Plato and Socrates for beginners and lays out his interpretation of the dialogue's structure and aims. Although he acknowledges that it can be read as "a *reductio ad absurdum* of the very argument it seems to be advancing," he is confident on the whole that Plato believes in the goodness of Kallipolis, and Reeve himself makes the best case he can for the desirability of the city. He interprets the form of the good as "an ideal of rational order or unity expressed in mathematical terms" (xvii) and holds that "Platonic truth" would have to be articulated in a "technical mathematics-like language" (xxiv). But as Ferrari points out in the Cambridge edition (xxx), "scholars dispute whether dialectical activity is some kind of meta-mathematics, or whether it quite transcends the ground that mathematics has prepared." Sachs, for one, insists that mathematics is not enough (see his note to 511a). In any case, Reeve's description of "Platonic truth" better fits the discourse of some analytic philosophy than that of the *Republic*.

Happily, such notions do not infect Reeve's translation, which shows a good ear and literary sense. His literally most dramatic choice is to recast the dialogue in direct discourse, replacing all the "he saids" with the name of the speaker (Socrates' narration is preserved, becoming occasional commentary and stage directions). This is consequently the only translation in which it is impossible to lose track of who is speaking—and on some interpretive theories, it is crucial to remember who Socrates' interlocutors are. Sachs finds the technique drastic (14); I find it refreshing, and agree with Reeve that "the minimal loss in literalness . . . is more than made up for in readability and intelligibility" (viii).

In his choice of particular terms, Reeve sticks closely to the traditional norms. His diction is a little more formal than Griffith's, but the text still reads like a natural conversation. In Reeve's hands, even highly abstract points come across in a clear and smooth way: "Apparently, then, it remains for us to find what partakes in both being and not being, and cannot correctly be called purely one or the other, so that if we find it, we can justifiably call it the object of belief, thereby

assigning extremes to extremes and in-betweens to in-betweens. Isn't that so?" (478e).

This edition includes 395 footnotes. A two-page bibliography focuses on mainstream English-language scholarship of the last thirty years. There is a four-page synopsis of the dialogue, a three-page glossary of terms, an eight-page glossary and index of names, and a twenty-one-page general index that provides the English and Greek for many key terms, with a wealth of Stephanus references. (It is worth pointing out to students that a glossary is not gospel truth, but a set of nutshell answers to sometimes controversial questions. For example, is irony only a "gracious self-deprecating way of speaking" [Sachs, 29], or is it "correctly attributed only to someone who intends to deceive" [Reeve, 328]?)

Allen (2006): This volume is the culmination of the life work of R. E. Allen, professor of classics and philosophy at Northwestern University, who passed away in April 2007.

Allen's introduction to the *Republic* wastes no words; twenty pages discuss an abundance of themes, including the connection between Thrasymachus and Oliver Wendell Holmes, the American founders' un-Platonic solution to the Platonic problem of faction, and the relation of the *Republic* to modern distinctions between the good and the right. Writing primarily for an audience that knows something of moral theory and has studied the text before, Allen does a good job of defending Socratic reasoning against a variety of criticisms. Some of these criticisms seem a bit stale today, such as H. A. Prichard's 1912 attack on Plato's "mistake" (xx–xxii), or the view of unnamed ordinary-language philosophers that Thrasymachus could have been refuted simply by examining the grammar of the word "virtue" (xvi–xvii). But on the whole, Allen's thoughts are relevant and helpful. He is particularly insightful when he points out that the *Republic* remains "as Socratic as earlier Socratic dialogues," because at its climax, the good "is left undefined and without an account" (xxvii).

Allen admires Cornford's version for "its style and nuanced choice of words" (vii); but he points out that a "sense of distance" is advisable, for the conversation in the *Republic* "did not take place between the folks next door" (viii). He follows traditional renderings of most important terms, and is sometimes scrupulously consistent (unlike most, he renders *eidōs* as "form" without exception: see his notes on pp. 127–35). Most of the translation is readily intelligible, although occasionally students, and a few teachers, may be sent to their dictionaries (Socrates is accused of "emulousness" at 336c). Sometimes Allen achieves an oral tone that is remarkably direct: "Then either you are stronger than we are, he said, or you're staying here" (327c). On the whole, he attains a truly "classical" style, clean and spare.

Allen does not use quotation marks, and does not use any device to remind the reader of who is speaking; it is inevitable that some beginners will get confused. He does provide an analysis of the dialogue, which takes the form of section headings that are inserted every few pages.

One hundred fifty-one footnotes offer linguistic and grammatical observations, refer to other dialogues, and make interpretive suggestions, occasionally quoting some older commentators. Allen had been planning “a more fully annotated edition” (vii). This edition has an eleven-page index, but no glossary or bibliography.

Sachs (2007): A St. John’s College tutor for thirty years who has learned from the work of elder colleagues such as Jacob Klein and Eva Brann, Sachs has also translated the *Theaetetus* and a number of works of Aristotle. This edition advertises a certain eccentricity on its cover, which features a sketch of a torch race on horseback (a coming event mentioned in passing at 328a, and discussed by Sachs in his introduction).

Sachs’s fifteen-page introduction makes a number of rich suggestions about how to approach the *Republic*. He points out that the dramatic course of the dialogue is itself an example of the establishment of justice, explores the meaning of dialectic, and emphasizes the importance of imagination in philosophy.

Sachs admires Bloom’s translation, but aims at a less antiquated and more fluid diction (13–14). Two small examples: “I suppose certain subtle lots must be fabricated” (460a, Bloom); “I imagine some ingenious lotteries need to be made up” (Sachs). Each form “is itself one, but, by showing up everywhere in a community with actions, bodies, and one another, each is an apparitional many” (476a, Bloom); “each of them itself is one, but since they make their appearance everywhere in common with actions and bodies and one another, each appears to be many” (Sachs). But at other points, Sachs is more of a stickler for consistency than Bloom: “That’s not a bad guess” (327c, Bloom); “That’s not bad seeming” (Sachs). (Below we will revisit Sachs’s use of “seeming” for *doxa* and its relatives.) In a few cases, Bloom slips, and Sachs’s translation is clearly superior: “And won’t he [the lover of wisdom] call them [lower pleasures] really necessary since he doesn’t need all the others if necessity did not accompany them?” (581e, Bloom); “Won’t he . . . say they’re in fact matters of necessity, since he wouldn’t want any of the others if they weren’t necessary?” (Sachs). Sachs wisely has Socrates speak of the “reasoning part” of the soul instead of Bloom’s “calculating part” (439d, etc.), but like Bloom, he uses the ugly “spiritedness” for *thumos*; “spirit,” as most translators realize, does just as well, as long as readers can set aside the Christian sense of the word.

Sachs's notable decisions include "polity" for *politeia*, "insight" for *nous*, and "look" for *eidōs* and *idea* in some places. This last choice takes a phenomenological approach that is indebted to Klein and Klein's teacher, Heidegger; Sachs discusses the issue in notes to 402c, 445c, 505a, and 597b. Sometimes Sachs's decisions are peculiar: if translating *to dikaion* in 354b–c as "justice" (with Griffith, Reeve, and Allen) is too loose, and one wishes to distinguish *to dikaion* from *dikaiousunē*, why not render it as "the just" (Bloom)? Instead, Sachs calls it "the just thing," which is clunky and misleading.

Each of the ten books begins with a list of its conversations and the participants, and a one-paragraph analysis that sketches the book's dramatic and thematic content. Sachs helps the reader keep track of the speakers by boldfacing their names when they enter or reenter the dialogue. There are 198 footnotes that not only explain allusions and linguistic issues, but also make insightful observations on the concepts and drama, with a touch of humor. This edition includes a six-page glossary of terms, with concise but insightful explanations. There is also a six-page index of names and themes.

John White's essay "Imitation," printed here as a twenty-four-page afterword, is a subtle piece that looks back at the whole *Republic* in the light of Book X, the rivalry between Socrates and Homer, and the paradoxical, self-canceling character of many developments in the dialogue. This piece works well as a retrospective and as an example of the tactful interpretation that Plato's work demands.

Five Key Passages

Let's turn to some important passages that illustrate some advantages and disadvantages of these translations. (In all these cases, the Burnet and Slings Greek texts are identical.)

1. Glaucon Tries to Define Justice (359a)

When he introduces his powerful devil's-advocate speech at the beginning of Book II, Glaucon promises to tell us what sort of thing justice is (358c). He seems to be trying to keep this promise in the following passage:

Plato: . . . καὶ εἶναι δὴ ταύτην γένεσιν τε καὶ οὐσίαν δικαιοσύνης, μεταξὺ οὐσαν τοῦ μὲν ἀρίστου ὄντος, ἐὰν ἀδικῶν μὴ διδῶ δίκην, τοῦ δὲ κακίστου, ἐὰν ἀδικούμενος τιμωρεῖσθαι ἀδύνατος ᾖ . . .

Waterfield: So that's the origin and nature of morality, on this view: it is a compromise between the ideal of doing wrong without having to pay for it, and the worst situation, which is having wrong done to one while lacking the means of exacting compensation.

An endnote to 359b observes, among other things, that “Glaucon’s account resonates with the fifth-century distinction (associated particularly with the sophistic movement) between nature and convention, and the preference for the competitive values of natural law rather than the co-operative values of conventional law.”

Griffith: They say that this is the origin and essential nature of justice, that it is a compromise between the best case, which is doing wrong and getting away with it, and the worst case, which is being wronged and being unable to retaliate.

Reeve: That, they say, is the origin and very being of justice. It is in between the best and the worst. The best is to do injustice without paying the penalty; the worst is to suffer it without being able to take revenge.

A footnote on “being” refers to the Glossary of Terms, where Reeve tersely writes, “**being** (*ousia*): Abstract noun derived from *einai* (to be). The being of (e.g.,) justice is what justice really is.”

Allen: This is the origin and essential nature of justice: it is intermediate between what is really best, which is to do injustice and not be punished for it, and what is worst, to suffer injustice and not be able to retaliate.

Sachs: [S]o this is the origin and being of justice, being in the middle between what is best, if one could do injustice and not pay a penalty, and what is worst, if one were powerless to take revenge when suffering injustice.

Observations: Waterfield’s endnote is correct, though the concept of values is somewhat anachronistic. The note brings out some of the problems with Waterfield’s translation of *dikaioṣunē* as “morality.” From the point of view that Glaucon is expounding, *dikaioṣunē* consists of a set of rules that arise from a social contract; these laws constitute what we would call a “justice system,” which punishes those who harm others. “Justice” is a better English word for the fundamental institutions that Glaucon is analyzing.

Both Waterfield and Griffith translate *adikein* as “do wrong,” obscuring this word’s close connection to *dikaioṣunē* and thus covering up the circularity of Glaucon’s explanation: he seems to be trying to define justice in terms of injustice. This flaw should be evident to the careful reader, who should recognize the need for a clearer conception. Ideally, the English reader would also be able to recognize that the phrase *dikēn didonai* literally means “to give justice”; this is not possible in any of the translations, although one could use a locution such as “pay the just penalty” or add a note.

Reeve’s glossary entry on “being” is fine in this context, but of course, *ousia* has other meanings in Greek philosophy too. In his entry on “thing that is (*to on*),” Reeve points out the “existential,” “predica-

tive,” and “veridical” meanings of *einai*, which he attributes to “the ambiguity of the verb.” This is a standard twentieth-century analytic view, which may be correct but, when presented dogmatically, hinders us from thinking as the Greeks did. Perhaps, as Sachs suggests in his glossary, the central meaning “stable identity” can unite the various senses of “being” in Plato.

Sachs’s rendition of this passage reflects the Greek, but comes across as awkward and obscure English. Allen and Reeve are simple and clear; Reeve’s punctuation breaks the text into units that make its meaning impossible to miss.

2. Philosophical Dogs (376b)

Having made the fateful decision to admit luxuries into their city, Socrates and his friends decide that it will need guardians who, like dogs, are devoted to their own people and hostile to outsiders. Guard dogs are “philosophical,” for they are lovers of knowledge: they love people they know, and hate people they don’t know.

This little joke is significant as the first allusion to questions about philosophy, knowledge, and truth that will be crucial in Books V–VII. Of course, as a little reflection will show, the unreflective guardians are not true philosophers. Hostility to the unfamiliar is, in fact, the very opposite of the desire to understand. As Socrates goes on to describe an educational program designed to create “canine” conformists, thoughtful readers are forced to ask: if politics requires this antiphilosophy, is there any room in a good city for philosophy? In this way, the joke at 376b sets up the third wave, which will introduce *true* philosophers as rulers. This passage, then, is an important moment in the conversation, as well as a test of whether the reader and translator understand the jest.

How is a dog philosophical?

Plato: ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ὄψιν οὐδενὶ ἄλλῳ φίλην καὶ ἐχθρὰν διακρίνει ἢ τῷ τὴν μὲν καταμαθεῖν, τὴν δὲ ἀγνοῆσαι. καίτοι πῶς οὐκ ἂν φιλομαθὲς εἴη συνέσει τε καὶ ἀγνοία ὀριζόμενον τό τε οἰκεῖον καὶ τὸ ἀλλότριον;

Waterfield: ‘Because,’ I explained, ‘their sole criterion for the friendliness or hostility of what they see is whether or not they have learnt to recognize it. Now, anything that relies on familiarity and unfamiliarity to define what is congenial and what is alien must prize learning, mustn’t it?’

An endnote to 375e claims, among other things, that “Plato . . . conflates the love of *knowing*, which we automatically associate with a philosopher, with a dog’s love of *the known*; . . . the conflation is justifiable in the light of the portrait of the philosopher at 474c ff. as a kind of omnivore of knowledge.”

Griffith: ‘Because,’ I replied, ‘it classifies what it sees as friendly or hostile solely on the fact that it knows one, and doesn’t know the other. It must be a lover of knowledge if it defines friend and enemy by means of knowledge and ignorance.’

A footnote to “philosopher” at the end of 375e reads: “*Philosophia* in Greek derives from two words meaning ‘love of wisdom’. It is largely at Plato’s hands that it comes to mean something closer to ‘philosophy’. See pp. xviii–xxii of the introduction.” In the introduction, Ferrari observes that “*philosophia* was still an elastic word [in the fourth century], and embraced intellectual activities of many sorts” (xix), and argues that “historically, the coincidence of philosophic ability and political power in notable individuals was by no means unprecedented” (xx).

Reeve: Socrates: In that it judges anything it sees to be either a friend or an enemy on no other basis than that it knows the one and does not know the other. And how could it be anything besides a lover of learning if it defines what is its own and what is alien to it in terms of knowledge and ignorance?

A footnote to “philosophical” at the end of 375e reads, “*Philosophos*: used here in its general sense to refer to intellectual curiosity or wanting knowledge for its own sake.”

A footnote to “lover of learning” provides the Greek: *philomathēs*.

Allen: Because, I replied, he distinguishes a friendly from an unfriendly face on no other basis than having learned to know the one but not the other. And yet, if he can distinguish what is his own and what is alien on the basis of knowledge and ignorance, how would he not be a lover of learning?

Sachs: “In that it distinguishes a face as friend or enemy,” I said, “by nothing other than the fact that it has learned the one and is ignorant of the other. And indeed, how could it not be a lover of learning when it determines what’s its own and what’s alien to it by means of understanding and ignorance?”

A few lines later, when Socrates says a human guardian too must be “a lover of wisdom and of learning,” Sachs comments in a footnote: “The comparison to the dog, meant about half-seriously, gives no explanation of such a conclusion other than the resemblance. The verb in 375D meaning ‘set beside for comparison’ [*pareballomen*] later came to mean ‘tell a parable.’ What is posited is that people who care most about learning and knowing are less at odds with those among whom they live.”

Observations: Waterfield translates *synesis* and *agnoia* as “familiarity and unfamiliarity.” Even though these are really the criteria used by dogs, Socrates’ words (especially *synesis*) refer to intellectual issues, not questions of familiarity. Socrates is illegitimately equating familiar-

ity and understanding; Waterfield does not capture the exact character of his sophistical joke. In fact, his endnote shows that he does not even entertain the possibility that there is a joke at work here; if there is a “conflation,” we must look for a way to save the logic of the passage. Waterfield thinks he has found the solution by jumping to the third wave, but the philosophers’ eagerness for knowledge as discussed there is obviously at odds with a doglike hostility to the unknown.

The footnote in Griffith is no less confusing. Not only does it seem to assume that we modern readers know exactly what “philosophy” is, but it makes the dubious suggestion that neither the historical Socrates nor any other pre-Platonic sophists or thinkers used the term as Plato does. The pages cited from Ferrari’s introduction are relevant to the third wave, but misleading in regards to the passage at hand. Griffith also conflates the distinction between friend and enemy with the related but importantly different distinction between one’s own (*to oikeion*, literally the domestic) and the alien.

The footnotes in Reeve and Sachs are also distracting. Surely both translators understand that Socrates’ little argument is “obvious nonsense” as a description of dogs (Sachs, 9); nevertheless, their notes could suggest that the doglike guardians really exhibit “intellectual curiosity” or “care . . . about learning and knowing” (cf. Sachs, 121n61; 349 s.v. “imitation”). This would make the third wave unsurprising; but in fact, it is very surprising (473d), because it reverses the earlier description of the rulers as the most tenacious believers in a dogma (412e) and, preferably, in a noble lie (414c).

Allen avoids commentary, and wisely lets the passage speak for itself. He provides a good and straightforward translation. But if we disregard Sachs’s problematic note, it is he who does the best job of capturing the senses of the various verbs in this sentence.

3. Doing One’s Own (441d–e)

Socrates has defined political justice as a condition in which each citizen is filling the role that suits his nature; he now introduces the crucial concept of psychological justice as an analogous condition—a state in which each part of the soul is functioning in a way that suits its nature.

Plato: Μνημονευτέον ἄρα ἡμῖν ὅτι καὶ ἡμῶν ἕκαστος, ὅτου ἂν τὰ αὐτοῦ ἕκαστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ πράττη, οὗτος δίκαιός τε ἔσται καὶ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττων.

Waterfield: ‘So we should impress upon our minds the idea that the same goes for human beings as well. Where each of the constituent parts of an individual does its own job, the individual will be moral and will do *his* own job.’

Griffith: ‘In that case, we must also remember that each one of us will be just, and perform his own proper task, when each of the elements within him is performing *its* proper task.’

Reeve: Socrates: We should also bear in mind, then, that in the case of each one of us as well, the one in whom each of the elements does its own job will be just and do his own job.

Allen: So we must remember that each of us also will be just and do what is his own when each of the kinds in us does its own.

Sachs: “Therefore we need to remember also that for each of us, that whoever has each of the things within him doing what properly belongs to it will be just himself and be someone who does what properly belongs to him.”

Footnote: “The reader should note that this last phrase has changed its meaning by passing to the other side of the analogy between city and soul. Here it no longer refers to limiting oneself to the particular job one is most suited for by nature. This is spelled out at 443C–D.”

Observations: Sachs’s note is right, and this is why Waterfield, Griffith, and Reeve create confusion when they insert the word “job” or “task” (as does Bloom with “mind his own business”). This can create the impression that there must be some harmony between political and psychological justice, so that the just city will be populated by just individuals. Quite a few readers make this assumption, but it simply is not the case: the just city, as described so far, consists of obedient functionaries, whereas a just individual obeys his own reason. (For a detailed refutation of such misreadings, see Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato’s “Republic,”* chapter 2.) “One’s own” is not, ultimately, one’s role in society, but rather what is individually best for one (586e). Ferrari is crystal clear on this point in his introduction (xxvii–xxviii), but Griffith’s translation muddies the waters.

Allen’s version would be short, sweet, and right if it weren’t for the curious choice of the word “kinds” to fill in Socrates’ indefinite reference to what lies within the individual. I conclude that despite its wordiness, Sachs’s version is best.

4. Justice Is Natural (444d)

Now Socrates points out that bodily health is like political and psychological justice: health, too, is the natural functioning of parts (the body’s organs). Hence justice in the soul can be called a kind of health—and as Glaucon himself now realizes, without such health, one’s life is not fit to live. Glaucon now sees an answer to the challenge that he posed to Socrates at the beginning of Book II, where he himself used health as an example of something both intrinsically and consequentially good (357c). Glaucon (if not Socrates) is now convinced that justice is good in itself, and not only for its consequences.

Here is the sentence in which Socrates spells out why justice is a natural, healthy state—an idea that will serve as a foundation for Aristotelian ethics and the natural law tradition:

Plato: Οὐκοῦν αὖ, ἔφη, τὸ δικαιοσύνην ἐμποιεῖν τὰ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ κατὰ φύσιν καθιστάναί κρατεῖν τε καὶ κρατεῖσθαι ὑπ’ ἀλλήλων τὸ δὲ ἀδικίαν παρὰ φύσιν ἄρχειν τε καὶ ἄρχεσθαι ἄλλο ὑπ’ ἄλλου;

Waterfield: ‘Doesn’t it follow,’ I said, ‘that you create morality by making the components of a mind control and be controlled as nature intended, and immorality by subverting this natural order?’

Griffith: ‘Does it follow, then,’ I asked, ‘that producing justice in its turn is a question of arranging the elements in the soul so that they control one another—and are controlled—in the way nature intends? Is producing injustice a question of their ruling and being ruled, one by another, in a way nature does not intend?’

Reeve: Socrates: Doesn’t it follow, then, that to produce justice is to establish the elements in the soul in a natural relation of mastering and being mastered by one another, while to produce injustice is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled by one another that is contrary to nature?

Allen: So again, I said, to cause justice to be present is to establish the parts within the soul as governing and being governed by each other according to nature; injustice causes one of them to rule and be ruled by another contrary to nature.

Sachs: “Then in turn, as for producing justice,” I said, “isn’t that settling the things in the soul into a condition of mastering and being mastered by one another in accord with nature, while producing injustice is settling them into ruling and being ruled one by another contrary to nature?”

Observations: Waterfield and Griffith go seriously wrong in using an idiom that personifies nature by ascribing intentions to it. By using the past tense, “intended,” Waterfield even creates the impression that Nature, like the Judeo-Christian Creator, formed us and willed a certain purpose for us. These translations echo the noble lie that people were made by Mother Earth (414d–e). But Socrates is now trying to present a non-mythical justification for virtue, a ground for justice that can be discovered in the nature of things by human reason.

Waterfield also condenses the end of Socrates’ question, so it becomes impossible for the reader to ask why Socrates uses two different verbs, *kratein* and *archein* (rendered by the other translators in various appropriate ways).

Allen makes a significant mistake when he turns “injustice” into the subject of the second half of the sentence. Injustice does not *cause* an unnatural condition of the soul; it *is* an unnatural condition of the soul.

This is a crucial distinction: it means that injustice is bad in itself, not only for its consequences. (Allen himself explains the importance of a similar distinction on p. xxvi of his introduction.)

Allen translates *empoiein* as “cause to be present,” which seems unnecessarily stilted and ontological. Sachs translates *kathistanai* with the odd “settling into.”

We are left with Reeve as the one translator who manages to render this sentence in an accessible and faithful way. A purist would point out, though, that his “elements” is an insertion; only Sachs translates *ta en tēi psychēi* with the strictly indefinite “the things in the soul.”

5. The Desire for the Good (505d)

We will not truly know whether health or justice is good until we know what the good itself is. In fact, Socrates goes farther and insists that without knowledge of the good, it is impossible to live well at all (595a–b). In a line that my students always have difficulty interpreting, he also claims that every human being wants truly good things. When it comes to goodness, everyone desires being and knowledge, not appearance and opinion; everyone, then, has a spark of philosophy.

Plato: Τί δέ; τόδε οὐ φανερόν, ὡς δίκαια μὲν καὶ καλὰ πολλοὶ ἂν ἔλοιντο τὰ δοκοῦντα, κἂν <εἰ> μὴ εἶη, ὅμως ταῦτα πράττειν καὶ κερτῆσθαι καὶ δοκεῖν, ἀγαθὰ δὲ οὐδεὶς ἔτι ἀρκεῖ τὰ δοκοῦντα κτᾶσθαι, ἀλλὰ τὰ ὄντα ζητοῦσιν, τὴν δὲ δόξαν ἐνταῦθα ἤδη πᾶς ἀτιμάζει;

Waterfield: ‘Well, isn’t it also clear that whereas (whether it’s a matter of doing something, or owning something, or having a certain reputation) people usually prefer the appearance of morality and right,* even if there’s no reality involved, yet no one is content with any possession that is only apparently good? It’s the reality of goodness they want; no one thinks at all highly of mere appearance in this sphere.’*

The asterisks refer to two endnotes:

morality and right: see Chapter 2.

in this sphere: the distinction between apparent good and real good needs some restriction. What is an apparent good? That sixth cocktail? If so, at the time I presumably *did* want it (however much I regret it the next morning), so Plato’s talk of not wanting apparent goods would be dubious. He must mean something like: ‘No one wants a lawnmower that looks good, but (as far as they know) doesn’t actually cut grass.’ Notice again the Platonic assumption of univocality (see e.g. 596a): in the context of a discussion about moral good, he talks equally about goodness in the sense of benefit. The ambiguity of ‘good’ was (in the guise of the analogy between morality and the crafts) the main recurrent difficulty with the arguments against Thrasymachus in Chapter I.

Griffith: ‘And isn’t something else clear? With justice or beauty, lots of people might settle for the appearance of them. Even if things aren’t really just or beautiful, they might choose to do, possess or think them anyway. When it comes to things which are good, on the other hand, no one has ever yet been satisfied with the appearance. They want things that really *are* good; they all treat the appearance of it with contempt.’

Reeve: Socrates: Well, isn’t it also clear that many people would choose things that are believed to be just or beautiful, even if they are not, and would act, acquire things, and form beliefs accordingly? Yet no one is satisfied to acquire things that are *believed* to be good. On the contrary, everyone seeks the things that *are* good. In this area, everyone disdains mere reputation.

Allen: But then, is it not evident that though many people would choose what seems just and beautiful, even if it is not really so, they nevertheless do and possess and judge these things? But it is not enough to possess things which merely seem good; instead, they seek what really is good. Here, at this point, all disdain the seeming.

Sachs: “And what about this? Isn’t it clear that many people would choose the things that seem to be just and beautiful, and even when they aren’t, would still do them, possess them, and have the seeming, though no one is content to possess what seems good, but people seek the things that *are* good, and in that case everyone has contempt for the seeming?”

Observations: “Chapter 2” in Waterfield’s first note means Glaucon’s and Adeimantus’s speeches at the beginning of Book II. His translation of *kalon* as “right” is peculiar, as it is hard to avoid interpreting “right” either as “just” or as “good,” *i.e.*, as one or the other of the two other concepts under discussion. “Beautiful” works best, even if *kalon* does have a wider scope than our word.

In his supercilious second note, Waterfield confidently assumes that we know what Plato himself believes and where he goes wrong. However, the errors are not nearly as obvious as Waterfield thinks. The text can easily be applied to the example of the sixth cocktail: the drinker perceives the drink as truly good (even if he is mistaken, or changes his mind the next morning). Socrates’ point is that we never choose something that, at the time, we believe to be only apparently good. Waterfield also seems to assume that the distinction between moral and instrumental goodness is written in stone, when instead, it may be a Christian or Kantian prejudice. (Allen’s introduction is particularly good on this point.)

All the translators manage to disentangle the passage in an intelligible way, although by breaking it into several sentences, Griffith and Reeve create the most accessible versions.

The main linguistic and philosophical issue in this passage is the concept of *doxa*, which means both appearance and opinion; the related verb *dokein* means both to appear and to opine. Waterfield and Griffith choose to emphasize appearance, Reeve emphasizes opinion. Allen and Sachs realize that the central phenomenon is *seeming*: my opinions are how things seem, or appear, to me. Sachs sticks consistently to forms of “seem”; Allen resorts to “judge” as a translation of *dokein*. Sachs, then, has the most accurate and philosophically deep translation, even though his version is the least likely to be understood by the unaided student. (Sometimes Sachs does use “opinion” for *doxa*. He explains the issues in a note to 476d.)

Recommendations

Every translation is a mixed bag—a collection of countless interpretive decisions, some better than others. One’s choice as a teacher will depend in part on the nature of the course and in part on one’s own hermeneutic approach to Plato.

If my own principles are correct, we must be skeptical of readings that assume that it is easy to identify Plato’s beliefs. Although Waterfield’s extensive introduction and notes are often useful, he is quicker to make this assumption than any other translator reviewed here. He is also the loosest in his translation, and his handling of some sensitive passages betrays insufficient care.

Griffith suffers to a lesser degree from some of the same problems, so despite Ferrari’s excellent editorial apparatus, the Cambridge edition cannot be recommended without reservations.

Both Reeve and Allen have produced accessible yet faithful translations that are good choices for most undergraduate courses. The more thorough apparatus in Reeve’s version will give it an edge for some teachers, and many will also appreciate its use of direct discourse. In my view, however, Allen’s introduction takes a more sophisticated interpretive approach.

As for the Sachs translation, if one is willing to make allowance for some peculiarities, it would serve well for students who are ready for an advanced, detailed study. I also recommend it to any jaded reader who would like to find some fresh perspectives on the familiar themes of the *Republic*.

Richard Polt, Dept. of Philosophy, Xavier University, 3800 Victory Pkwy, Cincinnati OH 45207; polt@xavier.edu