

PREFACE

Who has spent a lifetime reading Plato's writings and does not regard the *Republic* as his central work? It reaches higher and wider and displays a more lucid design and more artful devices than any other dialogue. It is, moreover, Socrates' longest conversation. It is inexhaustible.

Consequently the middle of this collection consists of four pieces on the *Republic*. The earliest and longest one, "The Music of the *Republic*," dealing mostly with the philosophical center of the dialogue, was first published in 1967 and reprinted occasionally by students; I have thoroughly revised it. The latest piece, about the last book of the dialogue, was delivered as a lecture in 2003. The *Republic* has surely been the dialogue closest to my soul.

Yet the dialogue that has given me most to think about is the *Sophist*. It contains what seems to me the third most portentous ancient discovery for philosophy (after Parmenides' revelation of Being and Socrates' hypothesis of the forms): the reinterpretation of Nonbeing as Otherness, which turns out to be indispensable for an understanding of that most fascinating of human

abilities—imaging. So this book contains three pieces on that dialogue, the first of which is an introduction written in collaboration with my colleagues Peter Kalkavage and Eric Salem for our translation of the *Sophist*.

Translating the *Sophist* (and then the *Phaedo*) together was an exhilarating experience of learning compounded with friendship, such as Socrates would have smiled upon. In the course of our collaboration we established some principles and practices for turning Socrates' conversations into English, which are reported herein.

Drawing students into these conversations is a part of our mission at my college. The pieces on other dialogues and themes are the fruits of this effort. The last little essay summarizes my notion of what might work for a teacher and what couldn't possibly.

I want to say, finally, that although this book is full of pretty confident interpretive conclusions concerning the Platonic text, in retrospect they all look more like preludes to new, perhaps deeper, questions.

Eva Brann
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