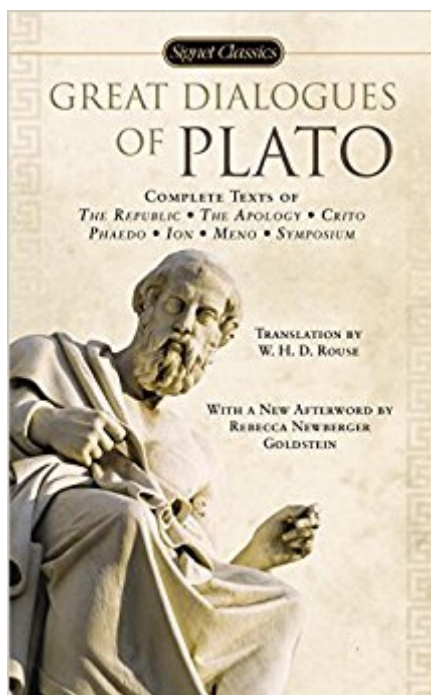


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Great Dialogues Of Plato



Synopsis

“Plato is philosophy, and philosophy, Plato.” —Emerson

The Republic and other great dialogues by the immortal Greek philosopher Plato are masterpieces that form part of the most important single body of writing in the history of philosophy. Beauty, love, immortality, knowledge, and justice are discussed in these dialogues, which magnificently express the glowing spirit of Platonic philosophy.

Translated by W. H. D. Rouse, one of the world’s most outstanding classical scholars and translator of Homer’s The Odyssey and The Iliad, this volume features the complete texts of seven of Plato’s most revered works.

“In Rouse’s pages Socrates’ strength of mind, his dedication to philosophical truth, are borne in on the modern reader with something of the power that impressed and disturbed the ancient Greeks.” —Time

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Customer Reviews

Plato (c. 427–347 b.c.) founded the Academy in Athens, the prototype of all Western universities, and wrote more than twenty philosophical dialogues.

W.H.D. Rouse (1863-1950) was one of the great modern experts on Ancient Greece, and headmaster of the Perse School, Cambridge, England, for 26 years. Under his leadership the school became widely known for the successful teaching of Greek and Latin as spoken languages. He derived his knowledge of the Greeks not only from his wide studies of classical literature, but also by travelling extensively in Greece.

Matthew S. Santirocco is Professor of Classics and Dean of the College of

Arts and Science at New York University. He has written on Greek and Roman literature and edits the journal *Classical World*. Rebecca Goldstein Newberger is the author of such novels as *The Mind-Body Problem*, *The Late-Summer Passion of a Woman of Mind*, and *36 Arguments for the Existence of God*, as well as acclaimed nonfiction including *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity* and *Plato at the Googleplex: Why Philosophy Won't Go Away*. Among her many honors and awards are a Guggenheim Fellowship, a MacArthur Fellowship, and grants from the National Science Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies. She was named Humanist of the Year by the American Humanist Association and elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She is currently Visiting Professor of Philosophy, New College of the Humanities, London.

Great Dialogues of PLATO
 INTRODUCTORY NOTE
 This is a dialogue between Socrates and the rhapsode or reciter, Ion of Ephesus, who declares himself unequalled as a reciter and exponent of Homer. The rhapsodes (‘‘song-stitchers’’) were men who made a living by giving public recitations from the great epic poets, chiefly Homer. The most successful held large audiences spellbound and moved them to amazement, laughter or tears. They also lectured or taught. Socrates suggests to Ion that his skill as a reciter and his hold on his audiences are due to divine inspiration passed down to him through the poet, and shows up as absurd the claims of the reciters to teach practical rules of conduct from Homer. The dialogue foreshadows the views on art as a whole which are explained in the *Republic* (see pp. 481–482).
 SOCRATES: Good morning, Ion. Where have you now come from in your travels? From home, from Ephesus?
 ION: Oh no, Socrates, from Epidaurus; I have been at the feast of Asclepius.
 SOCRATES: Do the Epidaurians hold a contest of reciters* of poetry in honour of the god?
 ION: Yes, of course, and in other fine arts also.
 SOCRATES: Well! and did you compete, please? And how did your contest go?
 ION: First prize is what I won, Socrates.
 SOCRATES: Well done! Now then, we must win the Panathenaia* too!
 ION: So we will, please God.
 SOCRATES: I have often envied you reciters that art of yours, Ion. You have to dress in all sorts of finery, and make yourselves as grand as you can, to live up to your art! And you are, at the same time, bound to spend your time on no end of good poets, especially Homer, the best and most divine of all poets; you have to learn his meaning thoroughly, not only his verses, another enviable thing. For no one could be a good reciter unless he understood what the poet says. Yes, the reciter must be the interpreter of the poet’s mind to the audience; and to do this, if he does not understand what the poet says, is impossible. So all that very properly makes one envy.
 ION: Very true, Socrates. At least I found this myself the

most troublesome part of the art; and I believe I can speak on Homer better than any other man alive. Not Metrodoros of Lampsacos, not Stesimbrotos the Thasian, not Glaucon, nor anyone else who ever was born could utter so many fine thoughts on Homer as I can.

SOCRATES: I'm glad to hear it, Ion, for it is clear you won't mind giving me a show.

ION: I will most certainly. You'll find it a treat to hear, Socrates, how finely I have decked out Homer! I believe I've earned a golden crown from the Homer Association.

SOCRATES: Many thanks. I'll make leisure to hear it some time, but just answer me one question now: Are you as good at Hesiod and Archilochos, or only Homer?

ION: Only Homer, no one else; I think Homer's quite enough.

SOCRATES: But is there anything which both Homer and Hesiod speak about, and say the same?

ION: Yes, I think so, a good many things.

SOCRATES: Well then, in such matters could you explain what Homer says better than what Hesiod says?

ION: Oh, just the same, Socrates, when they say the same.

SOCRATES: What about when they don't say the same? For example, they both say something about divination?

ION: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: Well then, could a good diviner explain better what these two poets say about divination, both when they say the same and when they don't, or could you?

ION: A diviner could.

SOCRATES: But if you were a diviner, and if you were able to explain what was said the same, you would know how to explain what was said otherwise?

ION: That's obvious.

SOCRATES: Then how comes it that you are good at Homer but not at Hesiod and the other poets? Does not Homer speak about those very things which all other poets speak of? War, now, has not he said nearly everything about war, and the intercourse of men together, good men and bad men, craftsmen and laymen, about the gods' dealings with men and with each other, how they do it, about what happens in heaven and in the house of Hades, and the origins of gods and heroes? Are not these the things about which Homer made his poetry?

ION: That is quite true, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And the other poets, did not they speak of these same things?

ION: Yes, they did, Socrates, but not as Homer did.

SOCRATES: What then, worse than Homer?

ION: Much worse.

SOCRATES: And Homer did it better?

ION: Better indeed, I should think so, by Zeus!

SOCRATES: Now listen, dear heart alive! Suppose there are several people talking about number, and one speaks much better than the rest; I suppose somebody will be able to pick out the good speaker?

ION: I should say so.

SOCRATES: Will it be the same person who can also pick out the bad speakers, or somebody else?

ION: The same, I suppose.

SOCRATES: Well, this will be the person who has arithmetic, the art of numbers?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: Very well. Suppose a number of people discussing which foods are healthy, and one speaking much the best; will the same person recognise that the best speaker speaks best and the worse worse, or will one person recognise the best and another the

worse? ION: The same, that's clear, I suppose. SOCRATES: Who is he? What's his name? ION: Doctor. SOCRATES: So we should say that in general the same person will always know who speaks well and who speaks badly, when a number of people are speaking about the same things; or else, if he does not know the bad speaker, it is clear he will not know the good speaker either about one and the same thing. ION: Just so. SOCRATES: Then the same person is good at both? ION: Yes. SOCRATES: Very well. You say, then, that both Homer and the other poets, two of them being Hesiod and Archilochos, speak about the same things, but not in the same way: that Homer speaks well, and the others not so well? ION: Yes, I do say so, and it is true. SOCRATES: Then if you recognise the one who speaks well, you would recognise the ones who speak worse, and know that they do speak worse? ION: Yes, so it seems. SOCRATES: Then, my dear fellow, if we say Ion is good at Homer and good at the other poets alike, we shan't be wrong, since you admit yourself that the same person is a sufficient judge of all that speak about the same things, and the poets pretty well all poetise the same things. ION: Very well, Socrates, kindly explain the reason for something I am about to tell you. When someone speaks about any other poet, I can't attend. I can't put in one single remark to the point, I can't just in a doze but only mention Homer and I'm wide awake in a jiffy, and I attend, and I have plenty to say! SOCRATES: Oh, that's not hard to guess, old fellow. Anyone can see that not by art and science are you able to speak about Homer; for if art made you able, you would be able to speak about all the other poets too; for there is, I suppose, an art of poetry as a whole; isn't there? ION: Yes. SOCRATES: Well now, if one gets a grasp of any other art whatever, the whole of it, the same way of looking at your problem holds good for all the arts, doesn't it? Would you like me to say what I mean, my dear Ion? ION: I should indeed, my dear Socrates; I love to listen to a clever man like you. SOCRATES: I only wish that were true, my dear Ion. But clever! You are the clever ones, you reciters and actors, and the poets whose verses you chant;* all I can do is to tell the truth, as any plain man can do. Just look at my question; how plain and simple it is; everyone recognises, as I said, that if one takes any art as a whole, it is the same problem for all arts. Suppose for our discussion we take, say, painting; there is a general art of painting, isn't there? ION: Yes. SOCRATES: And there have been also many painters, good and bad? ION: Certainly. SOCRATES: Well, have you ever seen anyone who was good at Polygnotos, son of Aglaophon, and could show which of his paintings are good and which are not, but with the other painters was incapable? When someone shows him works of other painters, does he just doze, and has nothing to say, and can't put in a remark: but when he has to give an opinion about Polygnotos, or any other one painter that you may choose, does he wake up and take

notice, and does he find plenty to say? ION: Oh dear me, no, not at all. SOCRATES: Well then, take sculpture: Did you ever see anyone who was good at Daidalos, Metion's son, or Epeios, Panopeus's son, or Theodoros the Samian, or any other one sculptor, and could explain all his good work, but before the work of the other sculptors is dumb-founded, starts dozing, and has nothing to say? ION: Oh dear me, no, I have not seen him either. SOCRATES: Go on, then, to piping and harping and singing to the harp and reciting poetry; you saw never a man, as I think, who was good at discoursing on Olympos or Thamyras or Orpheus, or Phemios, the Ithacan reciter, but is struck dumb before Ion the Ephesian, and has no remark to make when he recites well or ill! ION: I can't contradict you there, Socrates. But one thing I do know about myself: I speak about Homer better than any other man alive, I have plenty to say and all declare that I speak well; but yet about the others, no. Do just see what that means. SOCRATES: I do see, my dear Ion, and I'm going to show you what I think that means. Really, as I said just now, this is no art in you to speak well about Homer; no, some divine power is moving you, such as there is in that stone which Euripides called the Magnesian, but most people call it the Heracleian stone.* This magnet attracts iron rings, and not only that, but puts the same power into the iron rings, so that they can do the same as the stone does; they attract other rings, so that sometimes there is a whole long string of these rings hanging together, and all depend for their power on that one stone. So the Muse not only inspires people herself, but through these inspired ones others are inspired and dangle in a string. In fact, all the good poets who make epic poems use no art at all, but they are inspired and possessed when they utter all these beautiful poems, and so are the good lyric poets; these are not in their right mind when they make their beautiful songs, but they are like Corybants out of their wits dancing about. As soon as they mount on their harmony and rhythm, they become frantic and possessed; just as the Bacchant women, possessed and out of their senses, draw milk and honey out of the rivers, so the soul of these honey-singers does just the same, as they say themselves. The poets, as you know, tell us that they get their honey-songs from honey-fountains of the Muses, and pluck from what they call Muses' gardens, and Muses' dells, and bring them to us, like honeybees, on the wing themselves like the bees; and what they say is true. For the poet is an airy thing, a winged and a holy thing; and he cannot make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his senses and no mind is left in him; so long as he keeps possession of this, no man is able to make poetry and chant oracles. Not by art, then, they make their poetry with all those fine things about all sorts of matters—like your speeches about Homer—not by art, but by divine dispensation; therefore, the only poetry that each one can make is what the Muse has pushed him to make, one ecstatic odes, one hymns of praise, one songs for dance or

pantomime, one epic, one satiric iambic; in every other kind each one of them is a failure. For not by art do they speak these things, but by divine power, since if an art taught them how to speak well in one kind, they could do it also in all the other kinds. Therefore God takes the mind out of the poets, and uses them as his servants, and so also those who chant oracles, and divine seers; because he wishes us to know that not those we hear, who have no mind in them, are those who say such precious things, but God himself is the speaker, and through them he shows his meaning to us. A very strong piece of evidence for the argument is Tynnichos of Chalcis, who never made one poem which a man would think worth mentioning except only the hymn of praise which all the world sings,* well-nigh most beautiful of all lyrics, really and truly "a godsend from the Muses" as he calls it himself. Here most of all I think God has shown us, beyond all dispute, that these beautiful poems are not human, not made by man, but divine and made by God; and the poets are nothing but the gods' interpreters, possessed each by whatever god it may be. Just to prove this, God purposely sang the most beautiful of songs through the meanest of poets. Don't you think I speak the truth, my dear ION: Upon my word I do! You touch my soul in some way by your words, my dear Socrates! I feel sure that a divine dispensation from heaven for us makes good poets the interpreters in these things. SOCRATES: And don't you reciters interpret the poet's works? ION: That is quite true also. SOCRATES: So you are interpreters of interpreters? ION: We are indeed. SOCRATES: Then go on and tell me something more, my dear ION; don't hide it, just answer my question. When you speak your verses well, and astound the audience most—you know, when you sing how Odysseus leaps onto the threshold, and reveals himself to the wooers, and spreads out the arrows before his feet,* or how Achilles rushes on Hector, or one of those touching scenes about Andromache or Hecuba or Priam—are you in your right mind then, or do you get beside yourself, does your soul feel itself inspired and present in the action which you describe, somewhere in Ithaca or at Troy or wherever the epic scene is? ION: Clear as daylight I see your proof, my dear Socrates! I will not hide it, I will tell you frankly. Why, whenever I speak of sad and touching scenes, my eyes are full of tears; when it is something terrible or awful, my hair stands up straight with fear and my heart leaps! SOCRATES: Well then, my dear ION, could we say such a man is for the time being in his right senses who, decked out in gorgeous raiment and golden crown, bursts out crying at a sacrifice or a festival, when he has lost none of these fine things? Or who is terrified, with more than twenty thousand friendly faces about him, when no one robs him or wrongs him? ION: No, upon my word, not at all, my dear Socrates, to tell the honest truth.

I have to say that Having started this after reading Kaufman's translation of "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" I have an equal love for the treatment by W.H.D. Rouse in the dialogs. For a beginning philosophy student you can't really do any better than this excellent translation done in (fairly) modern english. (There's versions of this text dating from the 1950's here on .) For the serious student it's an intelligent idea to read more than one translation because there will always be differences and omissions. I've also read his excellent prose treatments of Homer as well--I know some of you prefer the poetic versions, however it is more important that people read these works even if the form has changed. If you've tried reading other translations and the reading seems too dry or seems too structured, this version is done in plain, conversational english.

It is a very good translation of Plato's dialogues. It is in first person as if Socrates is having conversations (dialogues) with various people. It is Plato's way of passing on Socrates' teaching using the Socratic method. I use it for high school at home but it is a good read for anyone interested in Plato, Socrates, Greek philosophy, the foundations of philosophy or philosophy in general.

makes for good reading

It is the book that's going to change your perspective in life, and make you realize how advance Greek was 200 years ago.

Small print, poor paper quality, and lame translation. Not recommended.

One of the greatest books of all time . Read it , and go back and re-read it . Read other peoples discussions about this book and the dialogues !

Plato is one of my favorite philosophers, read specific sections assigned by the teacher. Love Plato would recommend this to anyone

I have to read it for philosophy, it is a little confusing, but quite interesting.

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