

THE REPUBLIC OF PLATO

SECOND EDITION

TRANSLATED WITH NOTES AND
AN INTERPRETIVE ESSAY BY
ALLAN BLOOM



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524 e some other sense, it would not draw men toward being, as we were saying about the finger. But if some opposition to it is always seen at the same time, so that nothing looks as though it were one more than the opposite of one, then there would now be need of something to judge; and in this case, a soul would be compelled to be at a loss and to make an investigation, setting in motion the intelligence within it, and to ask what the one itself is. And thus the study of the one would
525 a be among those apt to lead and turn around toward the contemplation of what is."

"Surely," he said, "the sight, with respect to the one, possesses this characteristic to a very high degree. For we see the same thing at the same time as both one and as an unlimited multitude."

"If this is the case with the one," I said, "won't it be the same for all number?"

"Of course."

"And, further, the arts of calculation and number are both wholly concerned with number."¹²

"Quite so."

b "Then it looks as if they lead toward truth."

"Preternaturally so."

"Therefore, as it seems, they would be among the studies we are seeking. It's necessary for a warrior to learn them for the sake of his dispositions for the army, and for a philosopher because he must rise up out of becoming and take hold of being or else never become skilled at calculating."

"That's so," he said.

"And our guardian is both warrior and philosopher."

"Certainly."

c "Then it would be fitting, Glaucon, to set this study down in law and to persuade those who are going to participate in the greatest things in the city to go to calculation and to take it up, not after the fashion of private men, but to stay with it until they come to the contemplation of the nature of numbers with intellection itself, not practicing it for the sake of buying and selling like merchants or tradesmen, but for war and for ease of turning the soul itself around from becoming to truth and being."

"What you say is very fine," he said.

d "And further," I said, "now that the study of calculation has been mentioned, I recognize how subtle it is and how in many ways it is useful to us for what we want, if a man practices it for the sake of coming to know and not for trade."

"In what way?" he said.

"In the very way we were just now saying. It leads the soul powerfully upward and compels it to discuss numbers themselves. It won't at all permit anyone to propose for discussion numbers that are attached to visible or tangible bodies. For surely, you know the way of men who are clever in these things. If in the argument someone attempts to cut the one itself, they laugh and won't permit it. If you try to break it up into small coin, they multiply, taking good care against the one's ever looking like it were not one but many pieces."

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"What you say is very true," he said.

"What, Glaucon, do you suppose, would happen if someone were to ask them, 'you surprising men, what sort of numbers are you discussing, in which the one is as your axiom claims it to be—each one equal to every other one, without the slightest difference between them, and containing no parts within itself?' What do you suppose they would answer?"

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"I suppose they would answer that they are talking about those numbers that admit only of being thought and can be grasped in no other way."

"Do you see, then, my friend," I said, "that it's likely that this study is really compulsory for us, since it evidently compels the soul to use the intellect itself on the truth itself?"

b

"It most certainly does do that," he said.

"What about this? Have you already observed that men who are by nature apt at calculation are naturally quick in virtually all studies, while those who are slow, if they are educated and given gymnastic in it, all make progress by becoming quicker than they were, even if they are benefited in no other way?"

"That's so," he said.

"And, further, I don't suppose you would easily find many studies that take greater effort in the learning and in the practice than this."

c

"Certainly not."

"Then, for all these reasons this study shouldn't be neglected, and the best natures must be educated in it."

"I join my voice to yours," he said.

"Therefore we have settled on this one," I said. "And let's consider whether the study adjoining this one is in any way suitable."

"What is it?" he said. "Or do you mean geometry?"

"That's exactly it," I said.

"As much of it as applies to the business of war is plainly suitable," he said. "In pitching camp, assaulting places, gathering the army together and drawing it up in line, and in all other maneuvers ar-

d

526 d mies make in the battle itself and on marches, it would make quite a difference to a man whether he were skilled in geometry or not."

"However," I said, "for such things only a small portion of geometry—as of calculation—would suffice. It must be considered whether its greater and more advanced part tends to make it easier to
e make out the *idea* of the good. And we say that this tendency is possessed by everything that compels the soul to turn around to the region inhabited by the happiest part of what is, which is what the soul must by all means see."

"What you say is right," he said.

"Then if geometry compels one to look at being, it is suitable; if at becoming, it is not suitable."

"That is what we affirm."

527 a "Well, then," I said, "none of those who have even a little experience with geometry will dispute it with us: this kind of knowledge is exactly the opposite of what is said about it in the arguments of those who take it up."

"How?" he said.

"In that they surely speak in a way that is as ridiculous as it is necessary. They speak as though they were men of action and were making all the arguments for the sake of action, uttering sounds like 'squaring,' 'applying,' 'adding,' and everything of the sort, whereas the whole study is
b surely pursued for the sake of knowing."

"That's entirely certain," he said.

"Mustn't we also come to an agreement about the following point?"

"What?"

"That it is for the sake of knowing what is always, and not at all for what is at any time coming into being and passing away."

"That may well be agreed," he said. "For geometrical knowing is of what is always."

"Then, you noble man, it would draw the soul toward truth and be productive of philosophic understanding in directing upward what we now improperly direct downward."

"It does so," he said, "to the greatest extent possible."

c "Then to the greatest extent possible," I said, "the men in your beautiful city¹³ must be enjoined in no way to abstain from geometry. For even its by-products aren't slight."

"What are they?" he said.

"What you said about war, of course," I said, "and, in addition, with respect to finer reception of all studies, we surely know there is a general and complete difference between the man who has been devoted to geometry and the one who has not."