

## CHAPTER 3

*The Atlantis story: the Republic  
and the Timaeus*

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The *Republic* is linked to the *Timaeus* by the latter's preface, and also by the appearance in the *Timaeus* of the Atlantis story, which continues in the unfinished *Critias*. There are problems, well-known to scholars, with the link provided in the preface by the references to the *Republic*. Socrates in the *Timaeus* summarizes a speech he gave "yesterday" – but he is at a different festival, in entirely different company. He refers back to the ideal state in the *Republic*, but in a strikingly selective way. He touches on the communal life of the Guardians in Book 5 of the *Republic*, but he elides the *Republic's* distinction between the Guardians and the Auxiliaries, and, most strikingly, makes no mention at all of the point that the rulers of the ideal state are to be philosophers.<sup>1</sup>

Some scholars have taken these divergences to indicate that we are not meant to think here of the whole *Republic* as we have it,<sup>2</sup> but this does not solve any problems, since, as we shall see, the link between the dialogues provided by the Atlantis story requires us to bear in mind the *Republic's* main argument about virtue as well as the part about the ideal state. I have no solution to the anomalies in the preface beyond the rather obvious suggestion that Plato wants to link the argument of the *Republic* with the cosmological project of the *Timaeus*, and does so by means of selective reference to the *Republic* in a new context, one in which he refers only to the ideal state in Book 5. As we shall see, this sets us up for the Atlantis story.

In this chapter I will be focussing on the Atlantis story and its links to the main argument of the *Republic* and the cosmology of the *Timaeus*. I take it that the Atlantis story is fiction, something which I cannot argue fully for here, but has been convincingly established by scholarly work.<sup>3</sup> It is a story invented by Plato, drawing on mythical materials, which is intended to carry an ethical message.<sup>4</sup> It is told among serious and philosophically minded people like Socrates, Timaeus, and Critias,<sup>5</sup> and so the potential problems involved in representation, so stressed in the *Republic*, do not

apply here (*Ti.* 19c8–20b7). It has a message like those of Plato's myths in other dialogues, but here there are features which make it reasonable to regard it as, in our terms, a fictional story rather than a myth.

For a start, the story insists on its own truth, something which is a familiar feature of fiction. It has a long roundabout account of how the story came into the possession of the present teller, another familiar feature of fiction, which often starts with the "discovery" of a long-lost manuscript or the like.<sup>6</sup> It develops the picture of ancient Athens and Atlantis at length and with circumstantial detail which is itself not needed for the ethical message, but serves to build up an imaginary world that appeals to the reader's (or hearer's) imagination. This, again, is quite standard in fiction. It has been objected that Plato did not have a concept of fiction available,<sup>7</sup> but this is not a decisive objection, since the Greeks never developed a theoretical notion of fiction as a genre, despite later having many examples of fiction in ancient novels.<sup>8</sup> A society lacking our developed concept of fiction can still have a conception of fiction if it recognizes the convention of storytelling: the expectation that a narrative presented emphatically as true, and with much circumstantial detail, is not to be accepted as true. (This is especially so if it contains exotic details like the elephants and other wonders of Atlantis.) It is not assuming much to think that Plato's readers could work with this convention.

What is, however, the point of the Atlantis story? It may well, of course, have more than one point, but here I want to bring out something that suggests itself when we think of the story's linking function between the two dialogues.

As the story is announced in the *Timaeus* introduction, we are told that the ideal state did once exist in the world, in the form of ancient Athens. It did many great deeds, but its greatest was its successful repulse of a great invasion by Atlantis. The rulers of Atlantis, a huge island outside the Mediterranean, had extended their rule inside that sea, as far as Italy to the north and Egypt to the south. Then they invaded the Greek world; ancient Athens first led a coalition, then was left isolated, but defeated Atlantis on her own, not only preventing further "enslavement" of Mediterranean countries but freeing those that Atlantis had already "enslaved."

The reference here to the Persian empire, its invasion of Greece, and the battle of Marathon could hardly be clearer. Athenians, of course, never forgot Marathon, and regarded it as their finest hour. And, while Plato is scornful of facile patriotism, as we can see from the *Menexenus*, he thinks that the values and way of life of the generation of the Persian wars are worthy of respect. In a passage in *Laws* 3 he explicitly praises the response

of Athenians at that time, ascribing their unflinching virtue to their strict obedience to their laws (something undermined later by excessive freedom).<sup>9</sup> So far it looks as though virtuous ancient Athens, nobly repelling an unjust imperialist attack, is being evoked via thoughts about historical Athens and her noble stand against the Persians at Marathon.

But we are in for a surprise in the *Critias*, one which presumably comes as a shock to Plato's Athenian audience, who will have been expecting identification with the heroes of the Atlantis story. The description of ancient Athens turns her from a sea power into a land power, giving her wider land boundaries than historical Athens, and a layer of fertile agricultural soil. Ancient Athens is a city based on a surrounding area of rich farming land, with a separate warrior class living off a class of farmers, with modest buildings constructed for living and not for show, and a communal lifestyle; she comes to look utterly unlike historic Athens, and very like her enemy, historic Sparta. After this shock we then have a repetition of the point that the institutions of ancient Athens were ideally just, for they resembled those of the Guardians in the ideal state (*Cri.* 110c3–d4). Plato is here obviously distancing his Athenian audience from identification with the heroes of his story. He has other things in mind also; his Sparta-like ancient Athens foreshadows Magnesia of the *Laws*, with its blend of Athenian and Spartan institutions. But expectations that ancient Athens would resemble historic Athens of the Marathon period have been radically upended.

Ancient Athens, then, resembles historic Sparta. And as the description of it is built up, it is Atlantis which comes to resemble historic Athens – the Athens in fact of Plato's own youth, the period of a very different war, the Peloponnesian War. The Atlanteans have abundance of everything they need. But they are restless and seek to go beyond what they have. They build bridges and dig canals to join their city to the sea; they build docks and harbours and become traders, till the great harbour is full of the din of merchant ships coming and going. Their temples are massive and ostentatious. At first they obey their laws and hold virtue to be more important than wealth, but in time are led by greed and their power to subordinate virtue to wealth and show. We know from the earlier description that they used their sea power to conquer and dominate other people. *Critias* comments that they seemed at the height of fortune to people ignorant of the true nature of happiness, while to those who do judge rightly they were most wretched. Here it is obvious that Plato is thinking of the Athens of the fifth century, which became a great naval power and turned her allies into subjects, making them tributaries who paid for ostentatious buildings like the Parthenon and the Long Walls joining Athens to its seaport. The

*Gorgias* contains a similar protest in the mouth of Socrates: it is virtue, not wealth, which renders a city happy, and so Athens' proud temples and harbours, built on injustice, are "rubbish," not a cause for pride (*Grg.* 518d–519b).

We are told what is going to happen in the Atlantis story: Atlantis invades the Greek world and is utterly defeated by ancient Athens, losing even her former Mediterranean possessions. Again, there is a clear reference to the outcome of the Peloponnesian War, when Athens' hubristic expedition to Sicily ended in complete disaster and ultimately her own utter defeat, in which she lost her former tributary subjects. So much is clear not just from the obvious parallel, but from the presence in the dialogue of Hermocrates, the Syracusan general who was the main mover of opposition to the apparently invincible Athenians, and organizer of their destruction. Plato is, to say the least, making no concessions to Athenian patriotism of his day.<sup>10</sup>

The idea that the Atlantis story should be read as evoking both the Persian and Peloponnesian wars, but doing so in a way that identifies her with Atlantis while simultaneously foiling the identification of historic Athens with ideal ancient Athens, is of course not new; it has been influential among scholars (though not, as we will see, the broader culture) since the work of Vidal-Naquet and Gill. But what is Plato driving at with this elaborate layering of historical stories? Some have thought that he intends a detailed political message to Athens, a warning against renewed imperialist ambition in his own day.<sup>11</sup> It might also look like a recommendation to return to the "good old days" of Marathon and the "ancestral constitution" of Athens at that time, in contrast to Athens' contemporary democracy, blamed for Athens' sea-power imperialism and consequent defeat.<sup>12</sup> We can't exclude the idea that these messages are intended.<sup>13</sup> But the contrast of ancient Athens and Atlantis is introduced in the *Timaeus* in order to show the *ideal* state in action, so Plato would have failed to achieve his own aim if such specific messages are all that the story bears.

We might get some help here from the *Republic*. As the ideal state is introduced, it is famously as the "large letters" which will make justice in the individual soul easier for us to read (*Rep.* 368c7–369b4). Much of the description of the ideal state consists of only those details about it that we need to know in order to see the analogy between state and soul. Other aspects are described which illustrate the principle that it is knowledge alone that entitles someone to rule. There is one section of Book 5, however, which cannot be accounted for in this way. It begins at 466e1 with, "As for war, it's clear that this is how they will wage it," and continues with accounts

of children being taken to view battles, behavior to enemies and the like, until 471c3. This aspect of the ideal state – how it will wage war – has no analogue in the smaller letters of the individual soul; it is circumstantial detail in a picture of the ideal state itself. It is this passage, I suggest, which is uppermost in Socrates' mind when in the *Timaeus* he desires to see static figures from the *Republic* in motion: he wants, he says, a story of the ideal state in combat with other states in a way that shows how superior its character and education is to theirs (*Ti.* 19b–c). It is as if Plato had recognized the potential for fiction of the description of the ideal state, especially those aspects of it that have no analogue in the individual soul.

There is one crucial feature of the story, often underplayed. After Atlantis' defeat, the whole island is destroyed by earthquakes and sinks in the sea (*Criti.* 108e4–109a2). But the same cataclysm utterly destroys ancient Athens too (*Ti.* 25c6–d6). (That is, the Guardians are all destroyed; there are a few surviving farmers for historic Athenians to be descended from, but there are no written records, and so no cultural continuity.)<sup>14</sup> But the defeat of Atlantis is the greatest and finest of the many great deeds of ancient Athens. It is Zeus' punishment for the greed and injustice of the Atlanteans. Moreover, the victory has good results both on the ordinary level (ancient Athens frees the lands previously conquered by Atlantis) and on the ethical level (Zeus punishes the Atlanteans to improve them, making them more disciplined and orderly) (*Ti.* 24d6–e1, 25c3–6; *Criti.* 121b7–c2). The destruction equally of ancient Athens and Atlantis seems to make the great victory look alarmingly pointless.

There is a feeble response to this: Plato needs the story to end with general destruction so that the story can be lost, even to the ancient Athenians' descendants, until it is discovered by Solon, and hence by us. Plato, however, could have handled this mechanism of transmission differently if he had felt that having the general destruction follow the great victory rendered the latter pointless or detracted from it. As it is, the general destruction is introduced twice before Critias begins the story (*Ti.* 25c6–d6, *Criti.* 108e4–109a2), so our knowledge of how the story ends colors our hearing of it. Plato is not just "giving away the ending" but ensuring that we read the whole story knowing that ancient Athens perishes just as does Atlantis. This emphasis indicates that the general destruction is for him an important aspect of the story. It's reasonable, then, to ask what the point of it is in the story, rather than to dismiss it as merely a mechanism for the transmission of the story.

Here we can, I think, find a link with the *Republic*. The ideal state in the *Republic* is a state of virtuous people in an ideal society which encourages the

formation of virtuous people. In the main argument of the book Socrates undertakes to show that it is better for you to be virtuous even in the worst possible circumstances than wicked in the best possible circumstances. Glaucon presents him with the virtuous man who is misrepresented as well as ruined and tortured, and the wicked man who has a reputation for virtue and all worldly advantages; Socrates argues that even so it is better to be virtuous. Thus virtue cannot be recommended because of any of the advantages which normally come from it; it must be valuable and choice-worthy for itself alone.<sup>15</sup> Virtue is worth having for itself, not because it brings you wealth, or power, or the reputation for being virtuous; it is worth having even when it brings you none of these, indeed the opposites of all of them.

The people of the ideal state (at least the Guardians; in this context Plato forgets about the producers, and cares less about the division into Guardians and Auxiliaries) are virtuous people whose virtue is sustained by their society, unlike us. When we see them in action, in the Atlantis story, we see them acting virtuously without thought of gain or reputation. They stand alone against Atlantis because that is the virtuous thing to do. They do not take any advantage of their victory to get spoils, or power; they are not interested in money or gold, which are the concerns of the Atlanteans, and they free Atlantis' conquests instead of keeping them for themselves. (In this they are conspicuously unlike historic Athens after the Persian Wars.)

Among the things that being virtuous brings is usually a reputation for being virtuous; thus ancient Athens rightly got a reputation for bravery, like historic Athens after Marathon. But ancient Athens' deeds were lost and forgotten after the general destruction. We know from the main argument of the *Republic*, however, that reputation is one of the things whose loss makes virtue no less choiceworthy. It is irrelevant to the virtue, and so happiness, of the ancient Athenians that all knowledge of their great victory perished. Virtue is its own reward, even if other people are unaware of it.<sup>16</sup> There is a moral here for contemporary Athenians who are so proud of Marathon. Plato presents a world in which there will be periodic destructions of Greek societies, so one day Marathon will be as forgotten as the defeat of Atlantis was. But this is nothing for the fighters at Marathon to regret. People who fought at Marathon in order to achieve lasting fame were, Plato thinks, fighting for the wrong reason.

What of the Atlanteans? If their defeat merely made them greedier and more aggressive, then destruction would be good for them, saving them from further degeneration. But if, as Zeus hopes, defeat made them wiser and disciplined them, the general destruction seems to cut them off from

improvement.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps Plato thought that the punishment of injustice that happens when ancient Athens defeats Atlantis is a good in itself, unaffected by loss of knowledge of it, and doesn't raise the question of the Atlanteans' reaction to it. But it remains an awkwardness in the narrative.

I have suggested that the Atlantis story links to the *Republic* in that the general destruction following ancient Athens' great defeat of Atlantis can reasonably be seen as illustrating the main *Republic* argument: it is better for you to be virtuous even when virtue brings none of the usual rewards. What of a link to the *Timaeus*? This is less obvious, and indeed some have thought that Timaeus' speech does not really fit in its frame. There is, for example, the notorious clash between Timaeus' view of females as the result of males degenerating, and the ideal state in Socrates' introduction, where, as in the *Republic*, they are to share the education and activities of men (*Ti.* 18 c1-4; 42b3-d2, 90e6-91d6). Yet we can see a clear way in which the Atlantis story fits well into the *Timaeus*' cosmology.

The *Timaeus*' account of the cosmos gives humans a notably small part; they do not even get to be created by the Demiurge, only by the "created gods." Nonetheless, we humans are the best placed beings in the cosmos to understand it, if we can only get our rational soul to conform its movements to those of the cosmos, thereby returning to their natural (circular) form the motions that have been crushed in the perceiving body. Doing so is achieving the human *telos* of the best life, set before us by the gods (*Ti.* 90d1-7).

This might seem a remote kind of goal for humans living everyday lives, and it is clear from the passage that it is open only to the person who devotes himself in earnest to love of learning and true understanding; he will have immortal and divine thoughts insofar as he grasps truth, sharing in immortality insofar as mortals can. Such a person will be supremely happy, having taken proper care of the divine aspect of himself.<sup>18</sup> He will grasp the nature and workings of the cosmos and of his own part in it. He will understand that humans are a very small part of the cosmos, and that most of them are unruly and badly ordered, but that the cosmos as a whole is not only good, but as good as it can be. The best life for humans lies in developing their reason so that they conform to the ordered rationality of the cosmos.

How does this relate to the story of Atlantis? Only in the most general way in the *Timaeus* itself, and we have to remember that we have an unfinished trilogy, where perhaps the third part was intended to relate Timaeus' cosmology more closely to human actions, in something of the way we find in the *Laws*.

In the *Laws* we find it explicit that humans are very puny and insignificant in relation to God; and should feel humble about this.<sup>19</sup> We find in Book 10 that the world as a whole is as good as it can be, and misfortunes to particular people do not falsify this. The person who complains that bad things happen to good people is told two things. First, he is only a small part of the universe, which did not come about for his sake; rather the reverse. What is best for the entire universe is in fact best for him, since he is a part of it (*Laws* 903b4-d3). Second, the divine economy does judge rightly in terms of what matters, namely virtue and vice, so that good and bad people are rewarded and punished appropriately; this comes down to changing their "place" in the cosmos, the virtuous living with the virtuous and the vicious with other vicious people. Hence, nothing bad does actually happen to good people. Their virtue or vice is appropriately rewarded, and what happens to them, apart from what they do to make themselves virtuous or vicious, is part of the good workings of the universe, which it would be childish and misguided to resent (*Laws* 904c6-905c4).

I am not of course claiming that we can read these ideas back into the *Timaeus* itself. Rather, they are the kind of ideas appropriate to its cosmology when we think about humans and how they relate to good and bad fortune. The *Timaeus* itself is more interested in the details of the cosmos and its structure; the relation of humans to the cosmos waits to be spelled out until the *Laws*.<sup>20</sup> The *Timaeus* and *Laws* present these ideas in a cosmological setting rather than that of the ideal state of the *Republic*; but at a not too strenuous level of generality we can reasonably see that they take the same view about the happiness of the virtuous. Only virtue is relevant for living happily; so the virtuous do not lose, as people normally think they lose, when their city is destroyed and their actions forgotten.<sup>21</sup>

Insofar as we can reconstruct Plato's aim in writing the Atlantis story, as I have tried to do, we can see that it has links to both the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*. Ancient Athens is virtuous, and its citizens act virtuously even though all credit for their deeds is wiped out. The *Republic* argues for the value and benefit of virtue in a person's life even in the worst conditions of the actual world. In the *Timaeus* Plato creates a cosmology in which the goodness of the gods, insisted on in the *Republic*, is seen in the good ordering and construction of the whole cosmos, in which virtue and vice get the appropriate reward despite appearances.

In both dialogues, those who complain that bad things happen to good people are shown to be mistaken about what truly is good and bad. The *Timaeus* gives us a world-view which forms the background to this thought. Happiness is achieved by bringing one's thoughts into tune with the

rationality of the universe, from which perspective it can be appreciated that what is good for the whole is good for the parts, despite appearances. Hence, even where periodic destructions are part of our world, they do not diminish the goodness available to us. The people of the ideal city of the *Republic* are ideally virtuous. When they are seen "in motion" they act virtuously and do not lose anything by the destruction of their city, or by their actions being forgotten by others.

Plato, however, never completed the Atlantis story. We do not know why, especially since the unfinished *Critias* was considered important enough to be preserved. The ancients were no wiser than we are as to why it was never finished.<sup>22</sup> Clearly we would be ill-advised to make firm claims here, but I think we can see, from the nature of the Atlantis story as I have set it out, some reasons that may have given Plato pause about his new literary project.

The idea of Atlantis enjoys wide recognition in Western culture; indeed the Atlantis story has achieved wider fame than anything else Plato wrote (something that philosophers may easily miss).<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, Atlantis figures in our culture in two entirely different ways.

The first way is as a real place, a lost continent which can be discovered. This idea has a long history, one which picked up pace in the early modern period as Europeans began to explore distant parts of the world. The idea of discovering a lost civilization is exciting, particularly so if one can find links to it which promote one's own culture and show its ancestor to be the source of Western civilization. The siting of Atlantis in different parts of the world reflects to more or less extent the claims and self-image of the discoverers. To give only one example, the distinguished seventeenth-century Swedish scientist Olof Rudbeck spent years "proving" that Plato's Atlantis was actually Gamla Uppsala, prehistoric remains near his university town, thus placing the source of Western civilization in the north of Europe at a time of Swedish supremacy.<sup>24</sup> There has in fact been quite a competition to have Atlantis as the geographical or cultural ancestor of one's country. It is interesting that this competition is undeterred by the fact that Atlantis is the villain in Plato's story, the state which, in contrast to the ideal goodness of ancient Athens, falls because it becomes corrupted.

The advent of underwater archaeology has done nothing to dent the enthusiasm of Atlantis discoverers. Definite proof that there is no massive sunken continent in the Atlantic has merely encouraged discoverers to drop the requirement that Atlantis be west of the Mediterranean, and it has been located at Troy, and the Greek island of Thera,<sup>25</sup> as well as Bolivia and Britain.<sup>26</sup> In 2004 alone a US researcher "definitely" found Atlantis off the

coast of Cyprus, French researchers identified it with Spartel, a tiny sunken island near Gibraltar, a German researcher claimed that satellite images located Atlantis in southern Spain, and geographer Ulf Erlingsson identified it with Ireland. "I am amazed no one has come up with this before," Erlingsson remarked. "It's incredible."<sup>27</sup>

There is another role for Atlantis in our culture, that of a fantasy which recurs in science fiction novels and movies (including one by Disney) as part of plots involving a wondrous lost civilization, usually underwater. To the best of my knowledge Atlantis has not inspired any good literature, but if you skim the "Fantasy" and "Science Fiction" shelves in your local bookstore, it doesn't take long to find "Atlantis" in the titles. Caesar's Palace casino in Las Vegas has an Atlantis show.

One of the Strip's newest entertainment features unleashes the wrath of the gods on the city of Atlantis. Fire, water, smoke and special effects combine into an extravaganza as animatronic characters Atlas, Gadius and Alia struggle to rule Atlantis. Surrounded by a 50,000 gallon saltwater aquarium, the mythical sunken continent rises and falls before our eyes. Shows are daily on the hour, beginning at 10.00 am.<sup>28</sup>

Needless to say the plots of these movies, novels, and shows bear no relation to Plato's; people at Caesar's Palace would not be very entertained by virtuous ancient Athens.

I don't think it's a very bold counterfactual to say that Plato would have been extremely displeased by the factual role of Atlantis in contemporary culture. Trying to find the real Atlantis under the sea, or at Troy, or in Sweden, focusses attention on a particular place, and thinks of it as having a significance, which no particular item, even if it existed, could have. Plato's own interest in the Atlantis story is in telling a story about two cities which will illustrate a philosophical truth in narrative form. Apart from this role, concern with Atlantis itself, taking it to be an actual place with walls, harbours, canals, and so on, can only be a futile and even harmful use of our time and attention, which should be devoted to more philosophical activities.

Nor would Plato be any warmer towards the fantasy role of Atlantis. The objections he makes to artistic imitations in the *Republic* would all hold of stories and movies in which we are encouraged to enjoy the fantasy as mere entertainment. This is especially true where we are encouraged to enjoy the Atlantis fantasy in the absence of any ethical lesson about the Atlanteans' corruption coming from their greed for riches and material goods. In the *Timaeus* and *Critias* the story is carefully presented as a narrative which

supports philosophical ideas, presented among a select group of experts who will appreciate it for its contribution to the ideas presented in the *Republic*. But what has actually appealed about the story is the fantastic and exotic aspect of Atlantis, which is enjoyed with virtuous ancient Athens dropping out.

It is no accident that Atlantis has come to have both these roles for us. The story as we have it is an engaging narrative which draws us into its imagined world, full of circumstantial realistic detail about harbours, canals, and walls. Moreover, it is an exotic world. In Atlantis everything is lavish and luxurious; there are hot and cold baths, for example, and an abundance of all kinds of produce. Moreover, everything is of massive size; the temple of Poseidon, covered in silver and gold, is three times the size of the Parthenon. Despite its being in the west, Atlantis clearly has oriental features, such as elephants,<sup>29</sup> presented in an “orientalizing” way. It is a world which is described in realistic detail and yet is excitingly unlike ours. It seems no accident that the Atlantis story has lived on in genres that fuse realistic detail with the exotic, like fantasy novels and movies (and water shows at Caesar’s Palace). Plutarch remarks of the unfinished story that its introductory features, which he calls “porches and surrounds and courts (*prothura, periboloi, aulai*),” are “like those of no other *logos* or *muthos* or *poiēsis*” (Plutarch, *Life of Solon* 32). There is, we might say, a tremendous build-up to the story.

Having created something unprecedented, Plato may well have thought that there was a mismatch between vehicle and message. The point of the story is to illustrate the *Republic*’s message about virtue by putting it in a cosmic setting of the kind that the *Timaeus* will give a philosophical and scientific account of. If Plato worried that the details and exoticism of his story would encourage the wrong response to it – a fascination with Atlantis itself, its location, canals, temples, and elephants – we can only say that, judging from the story’s afterlife, he was right. Huge numbers of people find Atlantis a riveting subject of fact or fantasy, in ways that ignore, and draw attention away from, ancient Athens and its wholehearted devotion to virtue.<sup>30</sup>

## NOTES

1. As though to underline these points, we find the term *philosophos* used at 18a5 in a way clearly pointing to the *Republic*’s “philosophical dog” at 375d–376b, rather than the philosopher-rulers of Book V, and the term *epikouros*, at 18b3, used not of a separate class but of the Guardians themselves in their capacity as paid “mercenaries.”

2. It would surely be a mistake to think that this must be an “earlier version” of the *Republic*. Plato is capable of using his work in different ways in different settings.
3. Gill’s articles deal with the issue of fictionality from various perspectives. Clay 1999 has an interesting survey of ancient reactions to the story, some regarding it as fiction (notably Aristotle) and some as factual; it influenced later “utopian” writings.
4. See Vidal-Naquet 1964, 2008; Gill 1980, especially pp. xii and xiii; Clay 1999.
5. Is Hermocrates philosophically as well as practically and politically well-equipped? There is too little of him in the dialogues as we have them for us to conjecture what his role was meant to be (other than the obvious significance of his presence, reminding us of the disaster overtaking the hubristic Athenian expedition to Syracuse).
6. In modern fiction this device is by now regarded as over-obvious, and is found less in “serious” novels than in genre novels like detective stories. The long account of how the story came to be preserved also serves another function; see below, p. 57.
7. Gill 1993.
8. Feeney 1993. Greek novels, very clear examples of fiction, were very popular (we have a number of them, Jewish and Christian as well as pagan), but literary criticism never developed any theoretical account of them.
9. *Laws* 698a–701e. Plato there praises the men of the Persian War period, not just Marathon; but shortly afterwards (707b–d) claims that the land battles of Marathon and Plataea improved the Greeks, while sea battles like Salamis made them worse.
10. We can see from the satirical *Menexenus* that Athenians of Plato’s day dwelt endlessly on Marathon while skimming over the embarrassingly total defeat of the Peloponnesian War (in the *Menexenus* the “spin” with which the latter is presented is highly comic).
11. Morgan 1998 develops this idea, examining the fourth-century context of the story.
12. See Gill 1980, pp. xvii–xx for this idea.
13. And the passage in Book 3 of the *Laws* mentioned above shows that Plato was willing to subscribe to something like this view.
14. *Timaeus* 23b6–c3. We are told that all the soldier class (*to te par’humōn machimon pan*) were destroyed (25d1–2).
15. I am referring to the “two figures” of *Republic* 360e1–361d3 rather than the more tangled passage about three kinds of good. The “two figures” passage presents the challenge which Socrates accepts.
16. In the story this creates the transmission problem: we, the readers, have to be aware of it to appreciate this point. This creates the need for the long story about Solon and Egyptian priests, which underlines the unlikelihood of ancient Athens’ deeds being discovered.
17. As is suggested by Broadie 2001, p. 6, where she suggests that ancient Athens was saved by the destruction from the degeneration that occurs in the ideal

*Ethics and politics in Socrates' defense of justice*

Rachana Kamtekar

1. INTRODUCTION: WHY SO MUCH POLITICS?  
DEFENSE OF JUSTICE

In the *Republic*, Socrates argues that justice ought to be valued both for its own sake and for the sake of its consequences (358a1–3). His interlocutors Glaucon and Adeimantus have reported a number of arguments to the effect that the value of justice lies purely in the rewards and reputation that are the usual consequence of being seen to be just, and have asked Socrates to say what justice is and to show that justice is always intrinsically better than is acting contrary to justice when doing so would win you more non-moral goods. Glaucon presents these arguments as renewing Thrasymachus' Book 1 position that justice is "another's good" (358b–c, cf. 343c), which Thrasymachus had associated with the claim that the rulers in any constitution frame laws to their own advantage and call these laws' prescriptions "justice" (338d–339e); Glaucon picks up this claim in his account of the founding of the terms of justice by social contract (359a–b). In reply, on the assumption that the justice in the soul is the same sort of thing as the (more abundant or at any rate more visible) justice in the city (368e–369a), a claim he will later justify in the Book 4 argument for the tripartition of the soul, Socrates first describes a city based on need and specialization (369b–372d), then introduces and elaborates the musical and physical education of the citizens (376c–402a, 403c–412b), and then identifies the four virtues, which he assumes he will find in such a city (427e). (Socrates assumes that justice is a virtue, a good-making feature, of a city;<sup>1</sup> however, this leaves open the question of the goodness of justice for the agent who acts justly.) According to Socrates, the city's wisdom consists in the rulers' knowledge of what is good for the whole, its courage in the military's preservation of true beliefs about what is to be feared and what is not, its moderation in the classes' agreement that the rulers should rule; and so its justice – the remaining virtue – in the fact that in it, each class does its

state of the *Republic*. "More likely the Atlantideans were the unlucky ones, since they were cut off probably before they could absorb the moral lesson of their defeat."

18. *Timaetus* 90b6–c6. Plato plays on the idea of the *eudaimon* having a properly cared-for *daimon*.
19. The most extreme statement is to be found at *Laws* 804a4–c1.
20. Of course there are differences between the cosmological thought of the *Timaetus* and the *Laws* – the absence of the Demiurge in the latter, for example. But these differences are not relevant to the present point, that humans are placed in a cosmos which as a whole is ordered as well as it can be, and that virtue, and so happiness, reside in appreciating this.
21. There are adumbrations of this idea in the *Republic* itself, at 604b3–d6 and 486a1–b2. I owe these references to Tony Long.
22. Plutarch (*Life of Solon* 32) claims that Plato died before completing the Atlantis story. He does not cite any sources, and the claim parallels his claim (31, cf. 26) that Solon failed to finish his poem on Atlantis because of old age, not because of distraction by public affairs, as Plato claims.
23. A friend sends me Atlantis stories from the headlines of supermarket checkout magazines. Like more serious uses of the Atlantis idea, they reflect contemporary concerns – for example, concern about growing obesity rates is reflected in the "discovery" that Atlantis sank because the Atlanteans got too heavy (*Fatlantis*, *World Weekly News*, October 22, 2002). It is hard to imagine references to other Platonic works selling magazines at checkouts.
24. King 2005, although a superficial book, gives a riveting account of obsession (and university politics) revealing the blend of serious scientific endeavor and obsession in Rudbeck. His multi-volume *Atlantica* for some time received international respect.
25. Thera sprang into prominence after the discovery that it is the remains of a massive prehistoric volcanic eruption. See Rowe 1999, and Gill 1980 for discussions of the Troy and Thera claims.
26. In 1997 BBC News reported a British exploration to find Atlantis in Lake Poopo, an inland Bolivian lake, at the same time as a Russian expedition to find it in Little Sole Bank, a hundred miles off Land's End in Cornwall.
27. Sources here are BBC News Web page, June 7, 2004 and Reuters, August 6, November 15 and 16, 2004.
28. Flier for Caesar's Palace Forum Shops, 2003.
29. Elephants establish the setting as exotic. Rushdie 1996, p. 87, exploits this point, in promising his readers elephants at a point in the book where he imagines them complaining that the setting is insufficiently exotic. Presumably Atlantis discoverers who place it in northern countries have to invoke an earlier hot climate to accommodate the elephants.
30. I am grateful for comments from my audience at the Arizona Plato conference, where an earlier version of this chapter was read, and especially to my commentator, Tony Long.

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A Critical Guide

EDITED BY

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*For my wife, Neda*

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Trojan, Anchises' son:  
The descent into Avernus is easy.  
All night and all day long the doors of Hades stand open.  
But to retrace the path, and come up to the sweet air of heaven,  
That is the task, that is the toil.  
Some few whom God was right to love  
Or whose innate virtues singled them out from the common run  
Have done so. *Aeneid* 6.10

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