

**A SIX-BOOK VERSION OF PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*:  
Same Text Divided Differently, or Early Version?\***

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Of the many deep-rooted problems that scholarship on the *Republic* cannot avoid, few are as crucial as that of trying to assess how far it is a work of politics, and how far one of personal ethics. On the one hand there are three separate texts that appear to testify that the heart of the work is to be found primarily in books II (after 369b), III, and V (up to 461e); the first is the recapitulation at the beginning of book VIII (543a-c), the second the reminder at *Timaeus* 17c-19a, and the third Aristotle's account at *Politics* II.1-5.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand there are several indications within the work of a certain pessimism as to whether the political theory could ever be successfully put into practice, and even then whether it could endure. While V.472a-e constitutes important evidence that Plato is not investigating the ideal city for genuine political reasons, the most important longer passages of pessimistic material occur early in book VI, at 487b-97a, a section of 'gloomy realism' in Waterfield's words (1993, 219), and in books VIII-IX (to 588a), where we meet the account of the degeneration of the ideal state through successive stages into tyranny. In consequence, the *Laws* is often treated as Plato's exercise in practical politics, while the *Republic* is relegated to a kind of theoretical exercise, producing a paradigm-state that Plato had never dreamed of trying to bring into existence.<sup>2</sup>

Now I should like here to draw attention to a passage in *Epistle VII*—leaving aside any questions of authenticity since the burden of proof is on the side of those who would deny its value as a historical source—, a passage that makes it clear that Plato's intended role when called to Syracuse in 367 BC was to give the advice of a political theorist. At 330c-331d it is quite obvious that Plato is being sent for as a royal advisor, and there is a concentration of advice-terms with the root *συμβουλ*-.<sup>3</sup> That the advice was to be political rather than simply moral is guaranteed by the use of the example of private moral advice to determine the correct attitude to advising cities. The tradition followed by Diogenes Laertius is that Plato received a request 'for land and people who would live according to his constitution' (D.L. 3.21). While this may be somewhat exaggerated, it would have to imply that Plato was known at the time as a political theorist, and that the *Republic*, being the work that outlined a constitution, was the source of his reputation. If at that stage Plato had not taken his political theory seriously there would seem to have been rather few who appreciated that fact.

Fortunately there is a chance that there had once been a version of the *Republic* that did not include the pessimistic material. We possess the work of a grammatical

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the early Peripatetic library possessed a two-book 'epitome' of the *Republic* (D.L. 5.22 and 43). Further, Aulus Gellius (*NA* 14.3.3) talks of the first two books of the *Republic* to come into general circulation, in a context that would have demanded that the material should be primarily political and educational—we cannot assume that he is talking of books I and II.

<sup>2</sup> See Saunders (1970) 27-8, a passage still influential, in which intending the *Republic*'s constitution to be implemented would be regarded as 'political *naiveté*'.

<sup>3</sup> I count 15 cases between 330c9 and 331d7.

writer who had countered the work of grammatical purists, presumably Atticists, by indicating that the application of their strict ‘Attic’ regulations would undermine all the most respected literature, Attic and otherwise. The Antiatticista has received no new edition since Bekker (1814), and very little attention in his own right. This is most troublesome in the case of fragmentary comedy, where he is an important source and it is correspondingly important to understand his agenda. It is also important in the case of Plato, for it is he who refers to a *Republic* in six books, in which the sixth is our Book X, supplemented by a little from the end of IX. There has been no serious investigation into the importance of this text for Plato since Alline (1915), and even he may have depended on what he read in Hirmer (1897). Hirmer was a unitarian, not accepting the much-disputed evidence for an earlier version of the *Republic*, and thus he automatically assumed that the six-book *Republic* of the Antiatticista was simply our *Republic* divided differently. It is evident from his appendix that he recognised that there were several references that did not easily fit his pattern, whereby each book of the six-book version amounted to about a book and a half of our ten-book one, but he had an easy answer to this: there were many errors in the text of the Antiatticista, many as a result of its having been subjected to the activities of an epitomator before we received it.<sup>4</sup> The numbers of the individual books were something especially liable to corruption in transmission.

In order to determine how easily Hirmer might have been right one has to be able to evaluate the overall reliability of the Antiatticista, and compare it with the reliability of his citations of the *Republic*—assuming that the book division was as he had postulated it. There were other works of Plato to which he referred, and there were other authors who were cited by the book number. Of the Platonic citations that specify a given work 36 claim to be from *Republic*, 12 from *Phaedrus*, 9 from *Gorgias*, 8 from *Theaetetus*, 2 from *Phaedo*, and 1 from *Euthydemus*. Unlike other grammarians involved in the debates over Atticism, the Antiatticista cites no Platonic work that uses the late, hiatus-avoiding style, and makes the most use of the works that we assume came immediately before them. The omissions of the *Timaeus*, Plato’s most popular work in antiquity, and of the *Laws*, his longest, are particularly striking. It is thus likely that the author used an incomplete collection that happened to be available to him, a collection that had failed to acquire the late dialogues. A variety of considerations lead me to suppose that this was probably in Sicily or Italy. In a word, I think that the texts offer a snapshot of the texts that were important at the conclusion of what some refer to as Plato’s ‘Middle Period’, which is usually assumed to be complete by about the date of the second visit to Sicily in 367 BC.<sup>5</sup>

Brandwood (1976) helps one to realise that the 11 citations that claim to be from *Theaetetus*, *Phaedo*, and *Euthydemus* are correct; the 9 from the *Gorgias* include 3 that might plausibly have been interesting variant readings arising from a different version,<sup>6</sup> but are otherwise correct; the 12 from *Phaedrus* seem to include a major transmission error, a major mistake, a minor transmission error, and an attractive variant reading. On the whole, though, it would seem that the original author had made only one major mistake when recording what he had found in these texts, an error rate of a little over 3%. The most uncharitable view, which I could not endorse, would set the rate of mistakes at 22%. If we make the assumption that the

<sup>4</sup> See Lee (forthcoming) for this and other insights into the Antiatticista.

<sup>5</sup> The prologue of the *Theaetetus* is usually supposed to be making reference to a military campaign of 369 BC, though there are real problems with having Theaetetus fight in this campaign; readers may consult Nails (2002), s.v. Theaetetus.

<sup>6</sup> They are most unlikely to have arisen from scribal errors as I shall show elsewhere.

Antiatticista's *Republic* had read as ours does, then his citations would include a minimum of five that give the wrong book on Hirmer's hypothesis (78.23, 80.31, 87.22, 91.28, 94.29);<sup>7</sup> five references, two of which do not specify a book, fail to accord with anything in our *Republic*;<sup>8</sup> and a further five seem not quite in accordance with our text, though they might be explained on the basis of minor variations. This would give a total error-rate of around 38%, far in excess of anything that could apply in the case of the other dialogues. In case this anomaly is due to the fact that the *Republic* citations alone are by book-number, I have checked with the help of Schrader (1996 and 1998) the erroneous citations of Herodotus and Thucydides, also cited by book-number. My provisional figures are as follows, though there is some uncertainty about how to classify two of the Platonic errors, an uncertainty preserved in the following table:

Work	Citations	Wrong book	Other errors	Correct	Error rate
<i>Republic</i>	39 <sup>9</sup>	5 [+2?]	10 [-2?]	24	38.46
Herodotus	53	6 (5 x book I)	3	44	16.98
Thucydides	41	5 (3 x book I)	3	33	19.51

The figures for wrong books seem comparable, but with Herodotus and to a lesser extent Thucydides it looks almost as if book I has become a *default* position;<sup>10</sup> in the case of Herodotus this is more natural, since the author had afforded book I most attention.<sup>11</sup> There is no similar pattern behind the misallocation of books of the *Republic*.

Now in the case of the *Gorgias* at least I believe that the version preserved in the manuscripts has been subject to a later phase of editing than anything in the Antiatticista's text. Further, it is not clear that he was in possession of the complete *Theaetetus*, since the last of the 8 citations occurs less than half way through the dialogue at 169c. In the case of the *Republic* several apparent errors could be explained as variants that were edited out in later revision. For instance, the word δινισμός (90.27) could have stood for our δίνη in the Myth of Er, 620e3, where it would fit, while the word ἔκλεξις, allegedly in the fifth book (94.17), could have stood in the accusative for our ἐκλογήν, at 535a6. They do not look like simple scribal errors. But the *Republic* might also have been missing some key passages that are present in our own texts. It is worth considering, therefore, which longer passages are nowhere clearly referred to in the 39 citations.

I believe that Antiatticista refers to passages equivalent to the following points of our text:

<sup>7</sup> However, 80.31 involves a transmission error, since two dependent texts cite book X according to the six-book division as book VI, Phrynichus the Atticist (*Praeparatio Sophistica* 117.2), who flourished in the late second century AD, and a *Collection of Useful Words from Various Orators and Sages* (alpha 58.15).

<sup>8</sup> 90.27, 94.17, 111.16, 111.30, and 116.09.

<sup>9</sup> Not all correct references to Plato refer to the work by name, hence the discrepancy with our earlier figure of 36.

<sup>10</sup> Passages in Herodotus II, III, or IV account for 5 mentions of book I, while at 108.16 II is cited as V; passages in Thucydides II or III account for 3 mentions of book I, while III is also cited as IV and VII (once each, 105.1, and, more easily explained, 110.21).

<sup>11</sup> This is the case in Herodotus with about a third of citations that specify books (15) actually taken from book I; more citations of Thucydides come from III and IV than from I.

- I. 333d11, 337 e3, 340d/342b, 347 e5, 348c12
- II. 379d1
- III. 391b5, 391c5, 404d9, 406b5, 411c1
- IV. 420 e5, 422 e7, 431a7, 443a9, 444b2, 445c1
- V. 450a7, 460d3, 462b8, 474c2
- VI. 500a, 503a6, 505b6, 508c5
- VII. 521d3, 535a6, 537a10
- IX. 589c3, 590a5, 591a6, 591c7
- X. 601c1, 606b8, 615a.

There is no expectation that citations would be spread evenly across all books, especially since the forms of which the Atticists disapproved, and which therefore interested the author, would not have been evenly spread either. But if we look at which books of his own edition the Antiatticist actually cites one finds him claiming to cite each book between twice (book V) and eight times (book III). One would therefore not be expecting gaps as long as that from VII.537a10 to IX.589c3: approximately two of our books. It has to be asked whether the whole episode concerning the deterioration of the ideal state into eventual tyranny was ever included in what the author had read. Absent too is any reference to all that part of our book II before 379d, but most noticeably the whole of the widely respected passage where Glaucon and Adeimantus renew the onslaught against justice (357a-368c), a passage that seems particularly distrustful of human nature. And further, there is just one reference, involving use of the verb ἡγεμονεύειν (474c2), in the whole passage from 462e to 499a. Certainly some account of the philosopher-rulers would have had to figure in any version that contained the material on higher education, but it is eminently possible that it has been substantially expanded in the ten-book version. After all, V.462b8 is already cited as book IV in the Antiatticist, and 508c5 is still Book IV. If this had contained everything that our *Republic* contains, one might expect it to have stretched from 461e to 509c (more probably to 511e), at least 45 pages of Stephanus text.<sup>12</sup>

From our present perspective the important thing is that the material explaining the philosophers' appearance of uselessness in all present regimes, a passage evolving with some hard talking from Adeimantus again, is not represented in the citations from the six-book *Republic*, in spite of some colourful language. Much of the material in which Socrates appears to apologise for, or at least acknowledge the problems of implementing, key features of the philosophically run state, might therefore have been missing. The account of its decline and fall might also have been missing. We might plausibly have been left with a *Republic* that would have fitted into six scrolls rather than ten, a *Republic* that more confidently and optimistically advanced the political theories of Plato's Socrates. Such confidence would better explain the invitation to become an advisor to the Syracusan regime, and would have more naturally led Aristotle to treat it as an exercise in constitutional theory and hence as a predecessor of his own *Politics*.

The result to which this discussion leads is that there had probably been a version of the *Republic* in six books at a certain stage in Plato's lifetime, and probably at around 367 BC. It is from approximately this date that the collection of Platonic texts used by the Antiatticista derives, since it contained no 'late' works. The six-book *Republic* took the proposed constitution more seriously as a political contribution. After Plato's unfortunate experiences in Sicily he added further material, reflecting

<sup>12</sup> The average book length in our version is only 27 pages.

more pessimistically upon human nature, upon the philosopher's place in the polis, and upon the mutability of any constitution that might come about within this world. This revision had the overall effect of making it more difficult for modern readers to take the work seriously as a contribution to political philosophy, since Plato's own confidence in it was seriously undermined by his experiences. It is possible, but not necessary, that the difference in length between the 6-book and the 10-book version is reflected roughly in the number of 'books' into which each was divided.

### Stylometric Appendix

As was argued some years ago, certain features of narrated dialogues seem to have fallen out of favour in what we presume to have been the later dialogues of this type.<sup>13</sup> This was seen as offering potential chronological indicators among this group. Based on this hypothesis it was suggested on the basis of some rather crude calculations that *Republic* IX was the last book to reach its final form, but that book X had done so rather earlier than most of the *Republic*. Clearly it would suit the present thesis that at least the majority of *Republic* IX should be late, and written well after the bulk of X. Data on all regular vocabulary have recently become available to me, and I have been able to compare all books of the *Republic*, dividing them into 2000-word blocks.<sup>14</sup> Words that occur only in relation to certain subjects or only in dialogue of a particular type have been excluded in the interests of comparability, leaving only what are termed 'function-words'. Here is what happens when the computer analyses them by factor analysis:

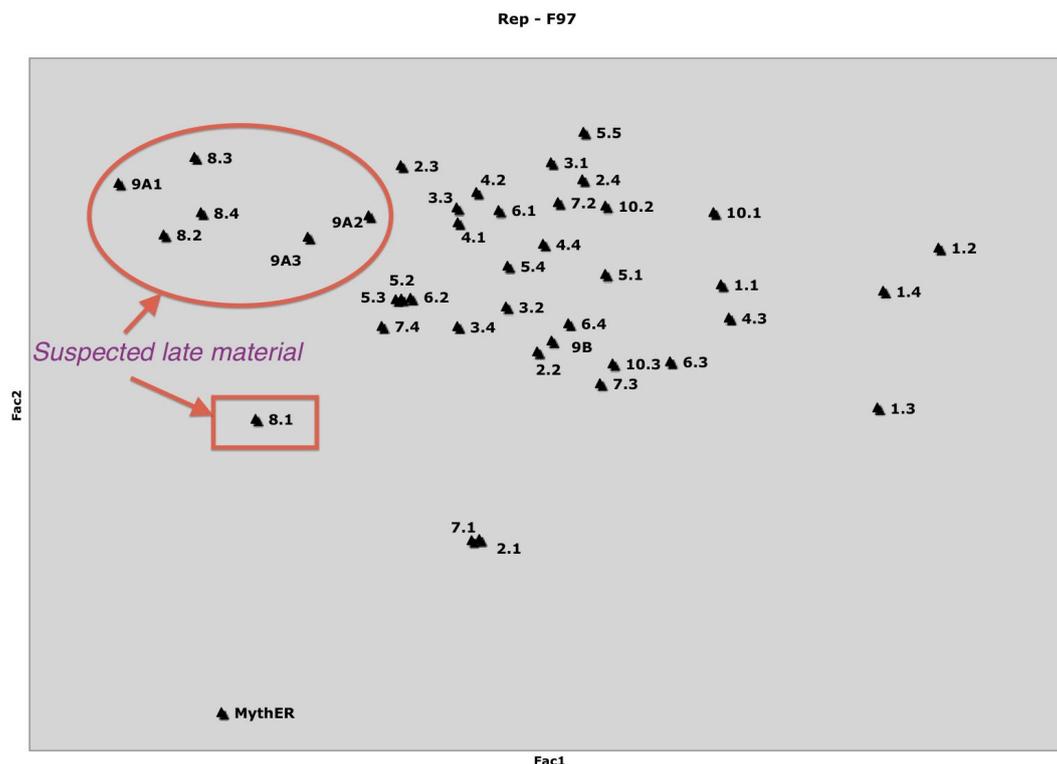


Chart 1: Factor analysis of Republic based on 97 function-words

<sup>13</sup> Tarrant (1994), recently republished as essay VI in Tarrant (2011), and with results tabulated in a more user-friendly format.

<sup>14</sup> Methods are similar to those of Tarrant (2010). The Myth of Er was taken as an integral self-standing block, and the part of IX from which the Antiatticista cites is treated as a separate, much smaller block.



*Republic* I falls just outside, and to the right of the oval indicating the *Republic* area, while the Myth of Er occurs well over to the left. The five blocks of the *Gorgias* are spread across much the same area as the eleven non-myth blocks of *Republic*, so that on this criterion the *Republic* (myth excepted) is actually as unified a work stylistically as one would be entitled to expect. It would be foolish to try to draw precise chronological conclusions from this chart. I would simply claim that it is compatible with the hypothesis that the work was finished over twelve to fifteen years, with Book I and Books VIII-IX at the opposite ends of the spectrum.

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somewhat, but includes all other words from the previous tests; inclusion of the verb to be is apt to make some blocks of *Sophist* etc. yield unexpected results, since non-thematic uses of 'be' are commoner in early works. *Parm.B* is off the map (to the top).