

# WORLDVIEW GUIDE

## PLATO'S REPUBLIC



*W. Bradford Littlejohn*

canonpress  
Moscow, Idaho







## CONTENTS

Introduction . . . . .	I
The World Around . . . . .	3
About the Author . . . . .	5
What Other Notables Said . . . . .	9
Setting, Characters, and Argument . . . . .	13
Worldview Analysis . . . . .	17
Quotables . . . . .	27
21 Significant Questions and Answers . . . . .	29
Further Discussion and Review . . . . .	41
Taking the Classics Quiz . . . . .	43





## INTRODUCTION

It's a rare accomplishment when one of the first representatives of a genre also turns out to be one of the greatest. But so it is for the *Republic*. One of the earliest attempts to write a sustained work of philosophy, Plato's masterpiece is also one of the widest-ranging philosophical enquiries, continuing to inform our questions and our thinking when it comes to being, truth, beauty, goodness, justice, community, the soul, and more.





## WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS

Few books, even among the classics, can boast such a wide range of themes and questions as Plato's *Republic*. Nearly all the perennial philosophical questions receive significant attention in the work, as well as many other issues, which, although we might now think of them as belonging to more practical disciplines, were for the ancients important questions of philosophy as well.

Among the former are such philosophical questions as these ten: *Is there such a thing as objective morality? What motivates people to do good? What is the relationship between knowledge and right action? How can virtue be taught? How can we come to reliably know objective truth? If truth is knowable, why are so many people mired in falsehood? What is the source of order in the universe? What is the true nature of God or the gods? Is the soul immortal? What is the relationship between the individual and society?*

Among the latter are such practical questions as: *What constitutes a good education? What is the value of literature and art? How should property be regulated? What are the different kinds of political constitution? How do political societies decay or improve?*

As we consider Plato's answers to these questions, we may be tempted to do so with a critical, dissecting eye, trying to single out all of the ways in which Plato, from our Christian perspective, goes astray. And yet our first response, on comparing Plato to the Bible and the Christian tradition, should probably be to be impressed at how often he seems to grasp the truth about the world, or at least grasp some part of it, even if he also sometimes whiffs it rather badly.

Consider the very first philosophical question above, *Is there such a thing as objective morality?*—perhaps the fundamental issue of our own day. In the modern West, we face our own hordes of 21<sup>st</sup>-century sophists: Thrasymachi arguing that the rules of traditional morality are simply oppressive restraints meant to benefit the ruling classes, and that the clever man acknowledges no law but his own self-interest. Tempted as we might be to dismiss such relativism and selfishness as the inevitable product of a “pagan worldview,” Plato shows us many arguments for responding to such relativism on the pagan's own terms. Indeed, his defense of the objectivity, beauty, and blessedness of justice even has a thing or two to teach us Christians.