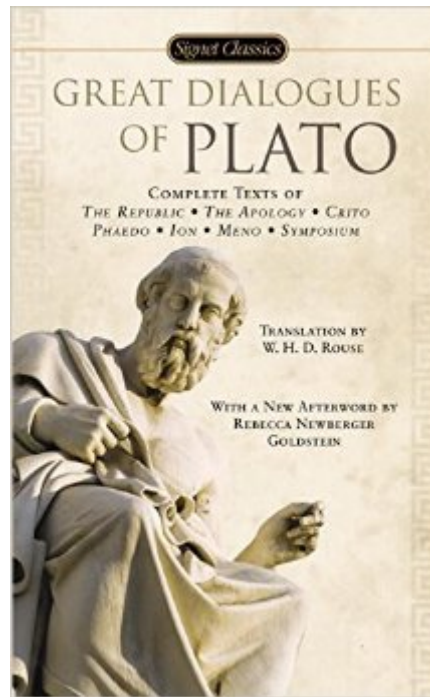


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Great Dialogues Of Plato



Synopsis

Plato is philosophy, and philosophy, Plato. Emerson's 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

I'm new to Plato. That should be said first. With that said, these are the things I have read: The Republic, Meno, Crito, Euthyphros, Symposium, Phaedo, Phaedrus and The Apology. With THAT said, you can appreciate, maybe, what I wanted to say about this book: Not all of those translations were in this book. Phaedrus was one good example of what was missing, and when I read that, I had read it in another book that I own, with the translator being Benjamin Jowett. I also read Jowett's translation of the Republic. After reading that translation, I came to this book, translated by Rouse. Hands down, Rouse takes the cake. I immediately noticed a difference in how easily the material is understood. Within the first ten pages of a reread of The Republic (and Symposium and Apology), I could understand what was being presented far better than I could in the other translation. I had thought before that the material was difficult to understand, and in books like

Phaedrus, it can seem so. What I discovered though, is that the material is only as difficult as the translators skill, or lack thereof, makes it. I know that some people have complained about how the material is 'anglicized' for the public, but I would think that this would be a good thing. Plato is from a different time and place than the mass of people living today (with only an elite few really having the full scope to understand everything needed to slog through Jowetts translation- I wasn't really one of them) and should be changed slightly to help accomodate those with the desire to understand him and the contributions he made. This book does that wonderfully. The annotations do a wonderful job of helping to explain what might seem vague. The quotation marks help to place dialogue in the (english) readers mind.

Love him or hate him (and there are plenty who feel both ways), Plato is essential reading for anyone interested in Western thought. So much so that A. N. Whitehead made the famous, if controversial, comment that "all of philosophy is but a series of footnotes to Plato." Even if that's a bit over the top, Plato is still simply one of those "must reads," for philosophy in particular, and for the humanities in general. Plato raised questions about virtue, justice, love, government, god, society, epistemology and metaphysics that we still wrestle with today, and his answers, for better or worse, have greatly impacted our culture and history. If you're new to Plato, this edition is a good start. I've had my copy of the Great Dialogues of Plato- now dog-eared, scribbled in, and Scotch-taped together- since I first wrestled with the Apology and the Republic in my high school humanities class. These are hardly Plato's only dialogues, but they are arguably the most important, especially for general students. Rouse's translations are highly readable. He captures the flavor of what Plato wanted to say and how he wanted to say it, without sounding antiquated or artificially modern. It's worth noting that this edition does not present the dialogues in the order in which Plato probably wrote them, but in the order which seems to represent the unfolding of the particular events described. Thus, the Apology, Crito and Phaedo- describing the trial and death of Socrates- come together at the end, even though the Apology was one of the first dialogues written by Plato, and the Phaedo was among his middle dialogues.

There is no point in trying to detract from the works of Plato themselves; anyone who is buying a collection of his dialogues is already convinced of his preeminence in Western philosophy. This translation, however, is honestly lousy, and it surprises me how well it seems to have been received. Though I have some training in philosophy (an undergraduate degree) I'm certainly not an ancient philosophy expert, and I found no difficulty in reading Jowett, and I imagine the average

reader approaching Plato would not either. Rouse's modus operandus appears to be to make Plato "accessible"--to a fault, I think. Whatever gains are made in clarity are more than countered by the awkwardness of the text and frequent anachronisms. To illustrate, here are two quotes from the first dialogue included, *Ion*: "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." What Rouse awkwardly translates as "Homer Association"--which sounds like a group of middle-aged men who get together every Wednesday to bowl and drink, or something--is preserved in Jowett's text as *Homeridae*, a group of ancient Greek Homeric scholars. How this could be confusing, especially with a simple footnote, is beyond me. Second: "Ion: When someone speaks about any other poet, I can't attend. I can't put in one single remark to the point, I'm just in a doze--but only mention Homer and I'm wide awake in a jiffy . . ." The term "jiffy" is so anachronistic and silly that it really distracts the reader from the flow of the text.

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