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# Preface

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The primary aim of this text is to offer a great deal of prosopographical, cultural, and contextual detail about the people, places and cultural landscape in which Plato situates Socrates. Over time the Anglo-American focus on argumentation in Plato has led to the erosion of contemporary knowledge of contextual details, details that inform and nuance what is being said in Plato's dialogues. Assessing the arguments stripped of context has also led to an erosion of our understanding of the intent of the dialogues. Debra Nails's *The People of Plato*<sup>1</sup> has brought this issue into sharp relief, and the translations and annotations contained in the present volume owe a great deal to her work, both in terms of the wealth of learned information she provides, and indeed in providing an impetus for this project in the first place.

The annotations provided herein, while by no means exhaustive or complete, are meant to serve as a reminder of how cultural context informs Socrates' conversations as well as an encouragement to students of Plato to develop an appreciation of the rich context in which the arguments take place. The people with whom Plato has Socrates interact, and the settings in which these interactions occur, are real and historical, even if the conversations are not always so. We have attempted to include a dramatic date for each dialogue; this is not to suggest that the conversations have that historical date, but it does speak to the milieu in which Plato conceives of the dialogues taking place. This is not to cast doubt on the events surrounding the trial and execution of Socrates, many of the details of which we find in Plato's *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, and *Phaedo*. The verbatim accuracy of what Plato reports about Socrates is the subject of a much deeper study and debate. It is the hope that this annotated set of translations will help bring to light ideas and contexts that may further reflection on that debate, and many other issues surrounding how we approach Platonic and Socratic philosophy.

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<sup>1</sup>Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*, Hackett 2002.

With the exception of the *Clitophon*, the dialogues included in the present volume are those most often considered in introductory courses on Plato. The story of the trial and execution of Socrates in the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, and *Phaedo* is augmented by the addition of the *Meno* and the *Clitophon*. The introductions and annotations are meant to leave as much room as possible for instructors to offer their interpretations of the dialogues. In short, every effort has been made not to predetermine how the dialogues should be understood.

The inclusion of the *Clitophon* is a choice meant to introduce an awareness of the Platonic *dubia*, those dialogues that have come down to us along with Plato's writings, but whose authorship or authenticity is a matter of disagreement among scholars. Scholars have debated the authenticity of this little dialogue for centuries, and its obvious connection to Plato's *Republic* suggests many possibilities for Plato's orientation towards Socratic philosophy, and Socrates himself. Hence the *Clitophon* raises many questions that can be explored in reading Plato's *Republic* as well.

The inclusion of the *Meno* has its own special purpose, in that it shows Socrates at work in a period before his trial and execution. An appreciation of the character of Meno and his associations with the sophist Gorgias, as well as his involvement with Greek mercenary forces in Persia, opens the dialogue up to new interpretations, avenues which are left for the reader to consider.

The same can be said of the *Euthyphro*. How we understand the character of Euthyphro, and the significance of Socrates' interaction with him on the steps of the courthouse where Socrates is to meet his fate, is deeply nuanced by an understanding of Athens' relationship to Naxos, the island where the murder for which Euthyphro is prosecuting his father took place. What this context brings to bear on our understanding of Euthyphro the man again offers varying perspectives on the dialogue.

Consideration of Plato's dialogues in this contextual light opens up a whole world; it is a gateway to appreciating Plato and Socrates, and the cultural and political arena in which they operate. The hope is that the details provided in this annotated collection will point the reader in the direction of a deeper investigation of that world, and consequently a deeper understanding of the philosophy that it generates.

The editors would like to thank the many people who supported this project: Justin Busch for proofreading the final draft; Jasmine Aimaq for cross-checking the footnotes and her unwavering support; Charles Young for his helpful advice on the art of translation and on how to proceed with publication; David Hitchcock for his helpful advice on the art of translation; the International Center at California State University San Bernardino for travel funds; the College of Arts and Letters and the Department of Philosophy at California

State University for release time and support; Sandrine Berges at Bilkent University, Ankara; the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy in New York for hosting a panel discussing the translations; faculty at Boğaziçi University and Istanbul Technical University for their continued support; Brandon Poole and Terry Kading at Thompson Rivers University; the Thompson Rivers University printshop; the staff at Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence; Bilim ve Sanat Vakafı, Istanbul; Esin Aslan (cover photo); readers at *Classical Philology* who commented on the reading of the *Clitophon*; the Department of Philosophy, History and Politics at Thompson Rivers University; the Department of Philosophy at Loyola Marymount University; and all the others who offered criticism of and advice about the various details of the project. Finally, the editors should like to thank Parviz Morewedge, who encouraged, gave generous feedback about, and had faith in, this project from the very beginning.

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Istanbul, May 2010