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Republic begins by posing a central question: "What is justice, and why should we be just, especially when the wicked often seem happier and more successful?" For Plato, the answer lies with the ways people, groups, and institutions organize and behave. A brilliant inquiry into the problems of constructing the perfect state, and the roles education, the arts, family, and religion should play in our lives, *Republic* employs picturesque settings, sharply outlined characters, and conversational dialogue to drive home the philosopher's often provocative arguments.

It has been said that the entire history of Western philosophy consists of nothing more than "a series of footnotes to Plato." Vastly entertaining, occasionally shocking, and always stimulating, *Republic* continues to enrich and expand the outlook of all who read it.

Elizabeth Watson Scharffenberger holds degrees from the University of Chicago and Columbia University. A specialist in the culture and literature of Athens during the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., she teaches at Columbia University and New York University's Gallatin School.

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