

LITERATURE AND ETHICAL VALUES: 21L.450
Fall, 2002

Lecture #3 - Plato, *The Republic*

Plato's dialogue, *The Republic*, dates from his middle years and was probably written about 365 BC. It is a lengthy work, of striking originality and awesomely rich in themes. Its central interlocutor and narrator is Socrates, Plato's mentor, who was executed by the Athenian citizenry in 399 BC, ostensibly for impiety but actually for practicing a free and open inquiry among his peers and stirring the youth of his day to doubt the virtues of traditional thinking. The participants of the dialogue include two of Plato's brothers and other leading citizens known to Plato's audience, most of whom, in one way or another, had subsequently come to untimely ends, often at each other's hands during the course of civil conflict. The subject of the dialogue is *Dikaiosyne*, a word usually translated as "justice", but its meaning is less legal than ethical and refers to what is proper and fitting in dealing with one's fellow human beings--what you owe them if you wish to act ethically. The word is sometimes translated as "righteousness".