



## Preface

This book arose from the public lecture and the faculty seminar I delivered as the seventeenth holder of the Tang Chun-I Visiting Professorship in Philosophy at The Chinese University of Hong Kong in the fall of 2012.

For their published presentation, the lecture's treatment of Kant's Plato and the seminar's presentation of Hegel's Plato were supplemented by a portrayal of Fichte's Plato—all three readings carried out with a focus on the unifying theme of Plato's *Republic* as a source of intellectual inspiration as much as an object of critical engagement in classical German philosophy.

The book's three core chapters, with their progression from the ideal republic in Kant through the real republic in Hegel to the people's republic in Fichte, are complemented by an introduction on the relationship of Plato's political philosophy, as contained in the *Republic*, to the republican legacy in Western political thought and by an appendix presenting my English translation, along with the German original, of a short text by Fichte titled "Plato Republic," dating from around 1807, which only recently has been published for the first time. Fichte's brief commentary on the first few books of the *Republic* serves to document his particular concern with Plato's primary political text.

The point of the proposed parallels between Plato and the neo-Platonism of Kant, Fichte and Hegel is not a historical study of influence but a philosophical consideration of import. By

effectuating an encounter between an ancient thinker and his modern descendants, a confluence of currents and a convergence of movements is to be brought about that provides the ancient past with a modern mirror and the modern positions with an ancient context. Such an artificial mutual encounter is apt to shed light, or at least generate some heat, in an area where the differences between old and new ways of thinking and doing are especially apparent—the political sphere and the philosophical reflection on it.

The larger context of research and teaching out of which the present book grew includes the graduate seminar I gave at The Chinese University under the auspices of the Tang Chun-I Visiting Professorship in October 2012, titled “Republics Old and New. Political Freedom in Classical Greek and Modern European Philosophy,” and a similar seminar I taught to graduate students from McGill University, Université de Montréal and Concordia University at McGill University in November 2012. The chief concerns of both courses were the continuities and discontinuities between ancient and modern thinking about the commonwealth (*res publica*) and the specifically different relationship between the human individual and the political community in the Greek city-state and in the modern sovereign territorial state.



I would like to thank the Department of Philosophy of The Chinese University of Hong Kong for inviting me to serve as the 17th Tang Chun-I Visiting Professor. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to the colleagues and students in the Department for their interest in my work and their eagerness to discuss my views. Special thanks go to my friend and colleague in the Department Tze-wan Kwan for his gracious hospitality during my stay.

The exceptional cultural, economic and political status of Hong Kong, along with the New Territories, as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) was as much on my mind in lecturing about republics old and new at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, as was the unique historical and current situation of Montreal, along with that of the province of Quebec, when I developed the work first presented in Hong Kong as one of my research projects under the auspices of the John G. Diefenbaker Award of the Canadian Council for the Arts (2012–13). For the academic hospitality I received during my year in Canada, I wish to thank the Department of Philosophy at McGill University, especially my host George di Giovanni.

I was able to finish work on this book in another extraordinary city, Venice, which can lay claim to the longest duration of republican self-governance, spanning more than a thousand years. A further republican setting of this and my other work has been the global republic of letters constituted by my doctoral students present and past, from sixteen countries on five continents, who have helped me in widening my intellectual and cultural horizons and placing my own philosophical positions in proper perspective.

Venice  
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