from the Introduction in Francis MacDonald Cornford, trans., *The Republic of Plato*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), pp. xvii-xviii.

When I was young, I had the same experience that comes to so many: I thought that, as soon as I could be my own master, I should enter public life. This intention was favored by certain circumstances in the political situation at Athens. The existing constitution was generally condemned, and a revolution took place[1]. . . Some of the leaders were relatives and friends of mine, and they at once invited me to co-operate, as if this were the natural course for me to take. No wonder that, young as I was, I imagined they would bring the state under their management from an iniquitous to a right way of life. Accordingly I watched closely to see what they would do. It was not long before I saw these men make the former constitution seem like a paradise. In particular they tried to send Socrates, my friend, then advance in years – a man whom I should not hesitate to call the most righteous man then living – with other persons to arrest one the citizens by violence for execution. Their purpose, no doubt, was to implicate Socrates, with or without his will, in their proceedings. He refused, preferring to face any danger rather than to be a party to their infamous deeds. Seeing all this and other things as bad, I was disgusted and drew back from the evils of the time.

Not long afterwards, the Thirty fell and the whole constitution was changed.[2] Once more I was attracted, though less eagerly, toward taking an active part in politics. In these unquiet times much was still going on that might move one to disgust, and it was no wonder that, during the revolutionary changes, some took savage vengeance upon their enemies, but on the whole the retuning exiles showed great moderation. Unfortunately, however, some of the men in

[1] The oligarchic revolution of 404 BC when Plato was 23, too young to hold office . . . A body known as the Thirty seized supreme power. Among the leaders were Plato's uncle Charmides and his cousin Critias.

[2] The Thirty, after about a year and a half of power, were superseded by the exiled democrats in 403 B.C. A prominent man in the restored democracy was Anytus, the chief accuser of Socrates on the change of "not believing in the gods of Athens and demoralizing the young men."

power brought my friend Socrates to trial on an abominable charge, the very last that could be made against Socrates – the charge of impiety. He was condemned and put to death – he who had refused to share the infamy of arresting one of the accusers' own friends when they themselves were in exile and misfortune.

When I considered these things and the men who were directing public affairs, and made a closer study, as I grew older, of law and custom, the harder it seemed to me to govern a state rightly. Without friends and trustworthy associates it was impossible to act; and these could not readily be found among my acquaintance, now that Athens was no longer ruled by the manners and institution of our forefathers; and to make new associates was by no means easy. At the same time the whole fabric of law and custom was going from bad to worse at an alarming rate. The result was that I, who had at first been full of eagerness for a public career, when I saw all this happening and everything going to pieces, fell at last into bewilderment. It did not cease to think in what way this situation might be amended and in particular the whole organization of the state; but I was all the while waiting for the right opportunity for action.