

Socrates to sartre and beyond research paper examples

[Life](#), [Death](#)



Introduction

Plato brought together the major schools of wisdom known at his time into one cognizant philosophy that endures to this day as one of the cornerstones of Western Philosophy. The physical Academy he founded was so renowned in his time and in the years to follow; it remained intact for almost a century through political changes, wars and turmoil. One of the reasons for this is that he sought truth and wisdom. While other philosophies dealt with individual problems Plato looked to the whole of understanding, acknowledged other viewpoints and incorporated them into his own philosophy if they were valid.

Plato's Life

Plato was born into a political family at the time of the Peloponnesian War, around 428 BCE. Everyone expected Plato to follow the family tradition of politics. When the Peloponnesian War ended the resulting decline of the Athenian Empire following the war spurred a conservative religious movement who executed Plato's mentor, Socrates. This combination of events at a time when the young Plato was entering into full manhood changed his life forever.

In his youth, Plato was a poet. When he met Socrates, his interests changed and he pursued virtue and the formation of a noble character. He did by building upon the foundation established by his studies of metaphysics and epistemology, and incorporated understanding of politic and morals learned from his family. By uniting these understandings and beliefs, Plato determined that remaining mindful of the philosophical importance of action

would result in a just and happy life .

Sparta defeated Athens in BCE 404 when Plato was around twenty-four years old. Plato's family played various roles in the restructured government that followed. For eight months, the Thirty Tyrants governed Athens. Plato's maternal great-uncle, Critias was the chief advocate of the Thirty and one of its extreme members. This oligarchic tyranny ruled for less than a year before a democracy replaced it. The political effects were more far-reaching. The first general amnesty in recorded Western history was granted to the people who participated in this regime, but many of the participants still found their reputations tainted. A "guilt by association" extended to non-participants as well including Plato's mentor, Socrates. As a result, the public turned against him thinking him to be anti-democratic.

The civil war that ousted the Thirty Tyrants saved Socrates from them, but, this did not save him from prosecution under the new democracy. He was tried for corrupting the cities youths, found guilty by a narrow margin and executed. Plato documented the trial of Socrates in his "Apology" These political intrigues, injustice and folly disaffected Plato and turned him away from his family's tradition of political pursuits. .

For twelve years after these events he traveled, sought out other philosophers, meet with wise men, prophets and priests and studied geometry, geology astronomy and religion in addition to philosophy. His full travels were not journaled but accounts find him traveling to Megara with Euclides, visiting Theodorus in Cyrene and studying with the Pythagoreans in Italy and traveling to Egypt. Plato left Italy shortly after he turned forty, returned to Athens and founded his Academy.

The next twenty six years were know as Plato's " Middle Period" He tended his Academy as you would a garden, with love, consistency and moderation. He developed his good reputation and a following of students and scholars. He delved into his metaphysical speculation and he wrote. From 367 to 361 BCE, to he tried several times but Syracuse did not have a good environment for philosophy. It was during these years that Aristotle entered Plato's Academy as a student. In the years that followed, there is little written about Plato's day to day life but it is a fair assumption that he wrote, taught and spent a great deal of time at his Academy. Plato died in 347. He left the Academy to his sister's son Speusippus. The Academy remained an intuition for almost one hundred years, until its closure by the Emperor Justinian in 529 CE.

Publications

Plato did not use notes for his lectures at the Academy but his student, Aristotle took notes for many of his lectures. Plato did compose over twenty dialogues. Even though the exact sequence is not recorded they are broken up into three groups. The first group, those assumed to be the earliest writings include Apology, Crito, Charmides, Laches, Euthyphro, Euthydemus, Cratylus, Protagoras and Gorgias. The second group consists of Meno, Symposium, Phaedo, Republic and Phaedrus. This second group includes the theory of forms and the Republic. The third group that represents the work he did later in life includes Theaetetus, Parmenides, Sophist, Statesman, Philebut, Timaeus and Laws. Although dominant themes run though the

works, Plato makes some changes in content and prospective and discards others as new themes emerge.

Apology

In the Greek language, the word for a defense speech is “ Apologia.” Plato’s Apology documents the Trial of Socrates when the citizens of Athens charged him with not recognizing the gods, inventing new deities and corrupting the youth. Socrates apologizes for not having learned the art of rhetoric that the politicians have mastered so that his defense speech will be plain and straightforward. Socrates denied that he gave physical explanations for divine matters and charged fees. Then he challenged anyone to testify against him. Socrates proceeded to a prophecy from the Oracle at Delphi that proclaimed him as the wisest of all men, this puzzled him because he knew nothing. In examining this he looked first to the politicians who were wordy not wise, and concluded he was indeed wiser than they, since he at least recognized that he knew nothing.

Meno

Meno conversed with Socrates and asked whether virtue can be taught. In defining virtue Meno asserts there are different kinds of virtue and likens it to a swarm of bees. Socrates proposes reducing it to the characteristics shared by all. Socrates then shows learning to be a matter or recollecting rather than discovering something new by having a slave boy figure out how to calculate the area of a square. Meno returns to the subject of if virtue can be taught. Socrates proposes two hypotheses, if virtue is knowledge it can be taught, if it is anything good that is not knowledge then perhaps virtue is

not knowledge and adds that nothing is good without wisdom. He concludes that virtue is wisdom so it cannot be something we are born with. This suggests virtue is a form of belief rather than knowledge; as such, it is a gift from the gods that we receive without understanding.

Phaedo, (Introducing the Forms)

Phaedo gives an account of Socrates' death by suicide to Echeocrates. In this he recounts Socrates' with Crito, Simmias and Cebes regarding how a true philosopher should look forward to death in so much as it frees the soul from the needs of the body. Since death is the final separation of the body and soul, it is the realization of the philosopher's life goal. Socrates then asserts that the soul is immortal and gives four arguments in support of this. The first is the Argument from Opposites, and as the living become dead, we must then assume the dead become living. The second is the Theory of Recollection, which asserts that learning is actually remembering things we knew before birth. True knowledge is eternal and relies upon forms that underlie reality. This supports the assumption that truth, and our experience extends before and after our life span on earth, and so must our souls. The third argument is the Argument from Affinity and distinguishes between the immaterial and immortal the material and perishable. the soul is immaterial the body material, so the soul must be immortal and the body mortal. When his friends object Socrates brings in a fourth arguments that is known as the Theory of Forms. A form represents perfection, exemplified by the perfect beauty of the Gods. Since the soul that animates us is connected to the Form of Life it is in no way connected to death.

Symposium

Symposium explores love in all its forms as explained by guests at a dinner party. These ranged from the oldest of all the Gods, and the one most likely to promote virtue, to the heavenly love between a man and a boy, a myth about the separation of one soul from its other half and the search to regain itself. Socrates relates having learned about love from Diotima of Mantinea who saw it as a coupling between Resource and Poverty. The next morning, after the revelry has waxed and waned, Socrates is still in sober discourse with Agathon and Aristophanes. This illustrates how moderation in food and drink can allow the philosopher to pursue intellectual discourse.

Plato's Theory of Knowledge

Plato believed in an underlying universal truth, which crossed personal and cultural barriers and existed before birth and after death. Meno demonstrates how he reduced truth to its common elements and this theme continues in the Forms from Phaedo, The Divided Line and The Cave from the Republic.

The Republic

Plato's Republic is his best-known work. The imaging is stunning in detail yet constructed with a precision that treats the subject in depth with no verbiage. Philosophers still study Plato's The Cave, The Divided Line and Theory of Forms, for their insights.

The Cave likens the common perception of reality to the experience prisoners might have if they were chained to a bench in a cave, only able to perceive the world by viewing shadows of statues on a wall. In such a

situation they would believe the shadows as reality; if released they would then think of the statues as real. The light outside the cave would blind them; only after a time in the light would they come to perceive true reality. Only when they finally became accustomed to this new reality could they see the sun as the source of light. He then likened the sun to the Form of the Good that is the source of all existence in the intelligible world.

In *The Divided Line*, Plato calls up the image of a vertical line divided first in half and then in quarters. The lower section represents the visible realm and the upper the intelligible. The visible is divided into imagination and belief; the intelligible into thought and understanding. The imagery in this likens imagination to the shadows in the cave, belief to the statues, thought to the perception of light and understanding to the final recognition of the sun as the source of light.

The Forms, first introduced in *Phaedo*, explores the physical world of material objects and sensory experience as a reflection of the true reality of the Forms that underlie the temporal experience. In the true world of Forms nothing passes away and nothing is imperfect. While justice may seem unjust to some in day-to-day existence, where the mighty and powerful establish what is right; in world of Forms, justice is perfect and eternal. This is the starting premise for the *Republic*.

The format for *The Republic* breaks from Plato's tradition of learning by discourse. The counterintuitive ideas he expressed in this book are expounded upon using common sense argument and extended speeches. Dictators and tyrants have often cited Plato's *Republic* as a justification for the State to seize control from individuals. This was not Plato's intent, he did

acknowledge that some people were more capable of ruling than others were, but those individuals were the ones most firmly called upon to sacrifice themselves and their lives to the Republic. They were the ones called upon to renounce material goods in order to maintain impartiality. He argued in favor of a scientific approach to deal with the essence of reality. This willingness to analyze and get to the universal basics of truth that is common to all people, in any nation was founded in his experiences while traveling and provides the strong foundation that makes his comprehension of truth relevant two and a half centuries later.

Works Cited

Beavers, Anthony F. and Christopher Planeaux. " The Life of Plato." 2012.

University of Evansville. 15 5 2012

Frede, Dorothea. " Plato's Ethics: An Overview." 2009. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 15 5 2012 .

Plato. " Meno by Plato." 2012 (Meno Page Update). Project Gutenberg. 16 5 2012 .

—. " Phaedo by Plato." 2012 (Phaedo Page Update). Project Gutenberg. 16 5 2012 .

—. " The Republic by Plato." 2012 (Republic Page Update). Project Gutenberg. 16 5 2012 .

Spark Notes. " Plato." 2012. Spark Notes. 15 5 2012 .

Stumpf, Samuel Enoch and James Fieser. A History of Philosophy, 8th Edition.

n. d