

# Sample literature review on plato and aristotle: art and rhetoric

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Plato and Aristotle are two of the most well-respected and influential minds in Greek philosophy and literature; Aristotle was Plato's student, and learned a great deal from him. However, at the same time, they had many subjects on which they differed. Plato, for example, believed that Art was a distraction from the need to search for real things and the ideal Form of Man, while Aristotle believed Art was a way to illustrate the view of real things.

Furthermore, Aristotle believed the practice of Rhetoric was a viable and illuminating way to look at the world, while Plato believed that it was merely a tool for deception. Between these two approaches, Plato and Aristotle proved themselves to be decidedly different philosophers with approaches that still overlapped in interesting ways.

In Plato's Republic, the philosopher has a lot to espouse on the subjects of art, poetry and the ways these things are linked together. Plato's opinion on art and poetry is really quite low; he thinks that focusing on artistic expression too much might get in the way of running a society. Plato's Theory of Forms (in which everything has a perfect Form that it must strive toward, even people) has a huge effect on the ways in which man moves throughout his world. This is often demonstrated by the pursuit of insight through the Forms to comprehend the nature of existence, in addition to having strong ethics, which results in the ability to coexist with others using politics. This innovative thread of understanding is the core of Plato's philosophy of life and civilization. Plato believes that Forms are vital for understanding because they can explain reality with abstract concept, and they are able to differentiate between objects in thought. A Form and a thought are decidedly dissimilar; the concept of a cow is not the same as the

Form of a particular cow. Objects may be split into practical and understandable worlds, both existing at the same time. In Forms, there are a number of universal attributes that are steady with every object, and comprise its real identity. Plato thinks that this makes the world more orderly, and as a result is what creates beauty in the world.

Plato's perspective, while pragmatic, give a lot of danger to the purpose of art and creativity compared to Aristotle's views. Plato says that art is inherently hazardous, assuming that all of our efforts must be dedicated to furthering our understanding of ourselves in the world; he does not think art does that. However, Aristotle believes that art, in its way of exploring human nature, and its ability to let us make simulations of the real world, actually serves to make us understand the world better. Aristotle's perspective is that art is, in reality, the personification of a real thing into external form; the making of a piece of art which simulates it does not render what is real less real, but instead allows us to look at it from another viewpoint. Art permits us to consider and contemplate people and objects, displaying them not as they really are, but how we want them to be (p. 39). As a result, Aristotle's views on Art makes for a fascinating difference from Plato's criticism of art as a detour from the quest for Forms.

Another way in which they differ is in the use of rhetoric as a means of relating to others and conveying ideas. Aristotle's definition of rhetoric is shown in his work *Rhetoric* as the *antistrophos*, or other part, to dialectic (Book 1: 1: 1-2). Rhetoric, as Aristotle claims, is the ability to understand how to convince someone of your point. Your central argument, is called an enthymeme, and making others see your point with rhetoric (persuasive

speech) requires modes of persuasion that also employ syllogisms (which is connected, comparative reasoning) and paradigms (which are patterns of reasoning).

Aristotle, in writing *Rhetoric*, wanted to prove wrong Plato's negative perspective of rhetoric – who considered it just as a method for determining the best way to fool people – by turning it into “a means for statesmanship rather than as a tool of despotism” (Nichols 1987, p. 657). Plato essentially agrees with Aristotle in that rhetoric is a powerful tool to use, but disagrees that it is able to be used for good; he criticizes the Sophists quite thoroughly for misusing it to mislead the people. Plato believes that rhetoric must be carefully used, using discourse to win over the soul of the people.

In conclusion, Plato and Aristotle both believe in the importance of human potential and its abilities; however, their opinions vary on how they should do it. Plato believes primarily in the theory of Forms, and that people should work toward understanding Forms and eschew any distractions. He is deeply distrustful of art and rhetoric, as he believes that it distracts from this search for insight. However, Aristotle thinks art and rhetoric are vital ways of understanding the human condition, as they allow us to communicate to others through simulations of real people and objects, and the ideal way to persuade others of their perspective.

## **Works Cited**

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