

# A life sketch of plato and his works essay sample

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If Thales was the first of all the great Greek philosophers, Plato must remain the best known of all the Greeks. The original name of this Athenian aristocrat was Aristiclis, but in his school days he received the nickname “Platon” (meaning “broad”) because of his broad shoulders. Plato was born in Athens, Greece to one of the oldest and most distinguished families in the city. He lived with his mother, Perictione, and his father, Ariston (Until Ariston died.)

Born in an aristocratic and rich family, Plato’s childhood was indulged within luxury. But his life changed when he came across Socrates. Socrates, a Greek philosopher who lived from 470-399 BC. He devoted all his time with young citizens discussing philosophy and questioning their confidence in the truth of popular opinions. As a young man, Plato grew up wanting to be a politician. However, after Socrates’ execution in 399 BC had a profound effect on Plato, and was perhaps the final event that convinced him to leave Athenian politics forever. To all accounts it appears that he left Athens for Megara, then went to visit Theodorus in Cyrene, moved on to study with the Pythagoreans in Italy, and finally to Egypt. During this period he studied the philosophy of his contemporaries, geometry, geology, astronomy and religion.

After 399 BC Plato began to write extensively. It is still up for debate whether he was writing before Socrates’ death, and the order in which he wrote his major texts is also uncertain. However, most scholars agree to divide Plato’s major work into three distinct groups. The first of these is known as the Socratic Dialogues because of how close he stays within the text to Socrates’ teachings. They were probably written during the years of his travels

between 399 and 387 BC. One of the texts in this group called the Apology seems to have been written shortly after Socrates' death. Other texts relegated to this group include the Crito, Laches, Lysis, Charmides, Euthyphro, and Hippias Minor and Major.

Plato returned to Athens in 387 BC and on land that had once belonged to Academos, he founded a school of learning which he called the Academy. Plato's school is often described as the first European university. Its curriculum offered subjects including astronomy, biology, mathematics, political theory, and philosophy. Plato hoped the Academy would provide a place where thinkers could work toward better government in the Grecian cities. The period from 387 to 361 BC is often called Plato's "middle" or transitional period. It is thought that he may have written the Meno, Euthydemus, Menexenus, Cratylus, Republic, Phaedrus, Symposium and Phaedo during this time.

The major difference between these texts and his earlier works is that he tends toward grander metaphysical themes and begins to establish his own voice in philosophy. Socrates still has a presence, however, sometimes as a fictional character. In the Meno for example, Plato writes of the Socratic idea that no one knowingly does wrong, and adds the new doctrine of recollection questioning whether virtue can be taught. In the Phaedo, the Platonic doctrine of the Forms, in which Plato makes claims as to the immortality of the human soul. The middle dialogues also reveal Plato's method of hypothesis.

Plato's most influential work, *The Republic*, is also a part of his middle dialogues. It is a discussion of the virtues of justice, courage, wisdom, and moderation, of the individual and in society. *The Republic* is a detailed discussion on Plato's political theories and the nature of justice. Plato believed that political philosophy was based on the human soul. He thought that the soul is divided into three parts: 1) the rational part (intellect), 2) the spirited part (will), and 3) appetite (desire). His reasons for believing his theory to be true are because these parts occasionally conflict with each other.

And like the soul, Plato felt that society has three parts or classes: 1) the philosopher king (who governs the society), 2) the guardian (who keeps order and defends society), and 3) the ordinary citizen, such as farmers, merchants, and craft workers, who provide the society's material needs. The philosopher king represents intellect, the guardian represents the will, and the ordinary citizen represents the appetite. In Plato's perfect society, the king controls the citizen, with the help of the guardian, forming a well functioning soul.

His final years at the Academy may be the years when he wrote the *Parmenides*, *Theatetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Timaeus*, *Cratylus*, *Philebus* and *Laws*. Socrates has been delegated a minor role in these texts. Plato used these dialogues to take a closer look at his earlier metaphysical speculations. He discussed art, including dance, music, poetry, architecture and drama, and ethics in regards to immortality, the mind, and Realism. He worked with the philosophy of mathematics, politics and religion, covering such specifics as censorship, atheism, and pantheism. In the area of epistemology he

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discussed a priori knowledge and Rationalism. In his theory of Forms, Plato suggested that the world of ideas is constant and true, opposing it to the world we perceive through our senses, which is deceptive and changeable.

This great philosopher died in 347, leaving the Academy to his sister's son Speusippus. The Academy remained a model for institutions of higher learning until it was closed, in 529 CE, by the Emperor Justinian.