



A Political Philosophy and Criticism in Plato's Life and his Works

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1. Introduction

Plato was born in 427 or 428 B.C. to a wealthy aristocratic family. His father was thought to be descended from the legendary *King Codrus*. During his young life, it is believed that Plato studied grammar, music, and gymnastics under renowned educators of the time. As a young man, Plato came in contact with a man named *Socrates*; who was his uncle's friend. Plato studied his works and even got included in *Socrates*' circle. In 399 BC, *Socrates* was unfairly executed because the people of Athens voted for his poisoning. This affected Plato so much that he was not going to work in politics like the rest of his family. After *Socrates* was executed, Plato hated everything about democracy and began the first of his many journeys. After leaving Athens, Plato travelled for 12 years, visiting places around the Mediterranean coast such as Italy, Egypt, and Libya, During the 12 year philosophical ranting, Plato also visited Syracuse. Plato made the tyrant there, *King Dionysius I*, very angry because Plato made *Dionysius*'s nephew his own disciple.

2. His Political Philosophy and Criticism

Plato was thrown into slavery but his freedom was bought back from friends of his in 387 BC. However, 20 years later Plato decided to go back to Syracuse. *Dionysius* the 2nd suspected his cousin *Dion*, the disciple of Plato's, was against him. Plato was put under house arrest and once he was released he never went back to Syracuse.

Once Plato returned to Athens in 387 BC, he published one of his most famous works *The republic*. Plato ended up writing many dialogues in which almost always featured *Socrates* except the *laws*. The first two dialogues were directly connected to *Socrates*' death, (*Apology*, and *Crito*). One dialogue that stood out from the other first dialogues was the "*Gorgias*". Although it may have been written ten or twelve years after *Socrates*' death, the "*Gorgias*" presents a systematic exposition of Socratic moral doctrine and a strong defence of this view against anti-moralist attack. The *Gorgias* repeatedly recalls *Socrates*' trial and matches it with a judgment myth, in which the souls of those who are truly guilty of injustice will be punished. In the *Crito*, *Socrates* had formulated as his fundamental moral principle that one should never act unjustly, ever return a wrong for a wrong. *Socrates* is prepared to die for this principle, and is unwilling to save his life by an unjust escape from prison.

"It is not living that is of chief importance, but living well, and that is living honourably and justly" (*Crito* 48b).

Finally, in the *Ion*, Plato develops a different Socratic theme concerning the knowledge in the other first dialogues. The *Ion* was Plato's first move in the never-ending battle of philosophy and poetry. Instead of attacking poets directly, Plato cleverly mocks the poets with a representative of sorts. The argument of the *Ion* was that poets were "non-cognitive" meaning they were out of their mind.

The middle dialogues, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, suggested that virtue is a type of knowledge. For example, in *laches* 2 generals were training in virtue and they proposed a definition to show their expertise by saying,

"If we know what virtue is, we should be able to say what it is. For if we not know at all what virtue is, how could we advise anyone how to acquire it?"

Republic was a huge part of Plato's works. It was quite controversial at the time because of the theory of forms. The definition of forms is this: forms-the changing world you experience, and the things in the world, are merely reflections of a separate world that contains unchanging existing things. Plato claimed that forms are the true object of knowledge and understanding. Many people, of course, disagreed with all of these claims. (Including Aristotle) Instead of a social contract theory, in which civil society is conceived as an artefact designed to bring people out of the state of nature, Plato claims to find a natural basis for social life in reciprocal need and the advantages of cooperation.

The *Theaetetus* is almost the last dialogue in which Socrates appears as the chief speaker. *Theaetetus*'s attempts to define knowledge fall into two categories, dividing the dialogue into two unequal parts. Although the general form of the *Theaetetus* is thus negative, the positive content is extremely rich. The *Theaetetus* ended up being one of Plato's odd works due to it also had the non-platonic viewpoints of *Parmenides* and how it somewhat went a different side of what the *Republic* was. Since Plato's emphasis philosophically is the ideal, it blended well with Aristotle's care for the world as we know it. The final dialogues, known as "later dialogues," were not quite as shocking and controversial as the first 2 groups, but packed the final philosophical blow to the world that everyone needed to hear. The *Timaeus* was for many centuries the most influential of all of Plato's works. After the rise of Christianity, it could be regarded as a philosophical base of the creation story in the Book of Genesis. A famous problem, debated already in Plato's school, is whether the creation story is to be taken literally. It was extremely difficult coming to a conclusion but Plato was able to quote himself from the forms theory,

"If we do not have to take creation literally, the Maker simply represents the principle of reason as a causal agency among the Forms."

The *Timaeus* thus interprets the cosmic act of the divine Maker in terms of the normative notion of mathematical measure. Without *Timaeus*, early religions wouldn't have been able to produce an actual answer to the creation issue. In the *Sophist*, Plato returns to questions of nature of being with a vengeance. The central theme of the dialogue is the problem of Not-Being, and it is argued that the concept of Being is equally problem causing, so that the two concepts must be clarified together. Accordingly, the dialogue surveys a series of questions that defy minds and positions, including both *Parmenidean* monism and a materialist view that reduces Being to bodily existence. A clearly recognizable version of Plato's classical theory is discussed as the doctrine of "the friends of the Forms." As in the *Parmenides*, a sympathetic critique is guaranteed here by the presence of a metaphysically oriented philosopher as protagonist.

Conclusion

Plato ended up writing 36 dialogues and ended up making a lot of people angry, but yet he was one of the best people to walk this planet. His theories on forms, love, knowledge, understanding, and of course virtue were so mind bending that everybody who was in his presence were motivated to take action. He also inspired platonic love which is when you love someone non-sexually. Plato strongly believed the purpose of philosophy is to enable one to live a good life. Aristotle took a liking to this kind of idea and brought the platonic idea to other generations of the time. The school

that Plato opened after returning to Athens is one of his major contributions to the development of western civilization. It was probably know as 'Akademia' because it was located at the Grove of *Academos*. It is believed that the word 'academy' has been derived from it. Led by great scholars like *Speusippus*, *Xenocrates*, *Polemon*, *Crates*, and *Arcesilaus*, the academy continued to function till its destruction in 84 BC. After that, it was revived many times. Today we can safely say that it was the forerunner of the modern educational system.

It is generally accepted that Plato passed away in around 348/347 BC at Athens. However, like many other events of his life, there is a controversy about how he died. Some scholars are of the opinion that he passed away peacefully in his sleep while others believe he breathed his last while listening to a young Thracian girl playing the flute. Still others believe that his death came while attending a wedding feast. Today, the scholars consider him to be the central figure in the development of western philosophy, science and mathematics. Some also refer to him as one of the founders of western religion and spirituality. Yet he is still remembered all over the world.