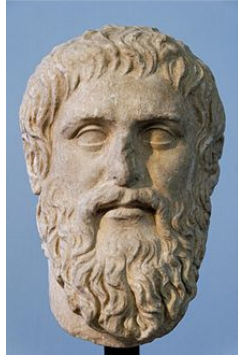


# Plato



Copy of portrait bust by **Silanon**

**Plato** (pron.: /'plɛrtou/; Greek: Πλάτων, *Plátōn*, "broad"; 424/423 BC – 348/347 BC) was a **Classical Greek** philosopher, mathematician, student of **Socrates**, writer of philosophical dialogues, and founder of the **Academy** in **Athens**, the first institution of higher learning in the **Western world**. Along with his mentor, Socrates, and his student, **Aristotle**, Plato helped to lay the foundations of **Western philosophy** and science. In the words of **A. N. Whitehead**:

The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato. I do not mean the systematic scheme of thought which scholars have doubtfully extracted from his writings. I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through them.

Plato's sophistication as a writer is evident in his **Socratic dialogues**; thirty-six dialogues and thirteen letters have been ascribed to him. Plato's writings have been published in several fashions; this has led to several conventions regarding the naming and referencing of Plato's texts. Plato's dialogues have been used to teach a range of subjects, including **philosophy**, logic, ethics, **rhetoric**, and **mathematics**. Plato is one of the most important founding figures in Western philosophy.

## **BIOGRAPHY**



*Early life of Plato*

## Birth and family

The exact place and time of Plato's birth are not known, but it is certain that he belonged to an aristocratic and influential family. Based on ancient sources, most modern scholars believe that he was born in Athens or [Aegina](#) between 429 and 423 BC. His father was [Ariston](#). According to a disputed tradition, reported by [Diogenes Laertius](#), Ariston traced his descent from the [king of Athens, Codrus](#), and the king of [Messenia, Melanthus](#). Plato's mother was [Perictione](#), whose family boasted of a relationship with the famous Athenian [lawmaker and lyric poet Solon](#). Perictione was sister of [Charmides](#) and niece of [Critias](#), both prominent figures of the [Thirty Tyrants](#), the brief [oligarchic regime](#), which followed on the collapse of Athens at the end of the [Peloponnesian War](#) (404–403 BC). Besides Plato himself, Ariston and Perictione had three other children; these were two sons, [Adeimantus](#) and [Glaucou](#), and a daughter [Potone](#), the mother of [Speusippus](#) (the nephew and successor of Plato as head of his philosophical Academy). According to the [Republic](#), Adeimantus and Glaucou were older than Pla Nevertheless, in his [Memorabilia](#), [Xenophon](#) presents Glaucou as younger than Plato.

The traditional date of Plato's birth (428/427) is based on a dubious interpretation of [Diogenes Laertius](#), who says, "When Socrates was gone, Plato joined Cratylus the Heracleitean and Hermogenes, who philosophized in the manner of Parmenides. Then, at twenty-eight, Hermodorus says, [Plato] went to Euclides in Megara." As Debra Nails argues, "The text itself gives no reason to infer that Plato left immediately for Megara and implies the very opposite." In his [Seventh Letter](#), Plato notes that his coming of age coincided with the taking of power by the Thirty, remarking, "But a youth under the age of twenty made him a laughingstock if he attempted to enter the political arena." Thus, Nails dates Plato's birth to 424/423.

According to some accounts, Ariston tried to force his attentions on Perictione, but failed in his purpose; then the [god Apollo](#) appeared to him in a vision, and as a result, Ariston left Perictione unmolested. Another legend related that, when Plato was an infant, bees settled on his lips while sleeping: an augury of the sweetness of style in which he would discourse philosophy.

Ariston appears to have died in Plato's childhood, although the precise dating of his death is difficult. Perictione then married [Pyrilampes](#), her mother's brother who had served many times as an ambassador to the [Persian court](#) and was a friend of [Pericles](#), the leader of the democratic faction in Athens. Pyrilampes had a son from a previous marriage, Demus, who was famous for his beauty. Perictione gave birth to Pyrilampes' second son, Antiphon, the half-brother of Plato, who appears in [Parmenides](#).

In contrast to his reticence about himself, Plato often introduced his distinguished relatives into his dialogues, or referred to them with some precision: Charmides has a dialogue named after him; Critias speaks in both *Charmides* and *Protagoras*; and Adeimantus and Glaucon take prominent parts in the *Republic*. These and other references suggest a considerable amount of family pride and enable us to reconstruct Plato's [family tree](#). According to Burnet, "the opening scene of the *Charmides* is a glorification of the whole [family] According to [Diogenes Laërtius](#), the philosopher was named *Aristocles* after his grandfather, but his [wrestling](#) coach, Ariston of Argos, dubbed him *Platon*, meaning "broad," on account of his robust figure. According to the sources mentioned by Diogenes (all dating from the [Alexandrian period](#)), Plato derived his name from the breadth (*platytês*) of his eloquence, or else because he was very wide (*platýs*) across the forehead. Recent scholars have argued that the legend about his name being *Aristocles* originated in the [Hellenistic age](#). *Plato* was a common name, of which 31 instances are known at Athens alone

[Apuleius](#) informs us that Speusippus praised Plato's quickness of mind and modesty as a boy, and the "first fruits of his youth infused with hard work and love of study". Plato must have been instructed in grammar, music, and [gymnastics](#) by the most distinguished teachers of his time. [Dicaearchus](#) went so far as to say that Plato wrestled at the [Isthmian games](#). Plato had also attended courses of philosophy; before meeting Socrates, he first became acquainted with [Cratylus](#) (a disciple of [Heraclitus](#), a prominent [pre-Socratic](#) Greek philosopher) and the Heraclitean doctrines. W. A. Borody argues that an Athenian openness towards a wider range of sexuality may have contributed to the Athenian philosophers' openness towards a wider range of thought, a cultural situation Borody describes as "polymorphously discursive."

### Plato and Socrates



Plato and [Socrates](#) in a medieval depiction

The precise relationship between Plato and Socrates remains an area of contention among scholars. Plato makes it clear in his *Apology of Socrates* that he was a devoted young follower. In that dialogue, Socrates is presented as mentioning Plato by name as one of those youths close enough to him to have been corrupted, if he were in fact guilty of corrupting the youth, and questioning why their fathers and brothers did not step forward to testify against him if he was indeed guilty of such a crime (33d-34a). Later, Plato is mentioned along with Crito, Critobolus, and Apollodorus as offering to pay a fine of 30 minas on Socrates' behalf, in lieu of the death penalty proposed by Meletus. In the *Phaedo*, the title character lists those who were in attendance at the prison on Socrates' last day, explaining Plato's absence by, "Plato was ill."

Plato never speaks in his own voice in his dialogues. In the *Second Letter*, it says, "no writing of Plato exists or ever will exist, but those now said to be his are those of a Socrates become beautiful and new"; if the Letter is Plato's, the final qualification seems to call into question the dialogues' historical fidelity. In any case, *Xenophon* and *Aristophanes* seem to present a somewhat different portrait of Socrates from the one Plato paints. Some have called attention to the problem of taking Plato's Socrates to be his mouthpiece, given Socrates' reputation for irony and the dramatic nature of the dialogue form

Aristotle attributes a different doctrine with respect to the *ideas* to Plato and Socrates. Putting it in a nutshell, Aristotle merely suggests that Socrates' idea of forms can be discovered through investigation of the natural world, unlike Plato's Forms that exist beyond and outside the ordinary range of human understanding.

### **Later life**

Plato may have traveled in *Italy*, *Sicily*, *Egypt* and *Cyrene*. Said to have returned to Athens at the age of forty, Plato founded one of the earliest known organized schools in Western Civilization on a plot of land in the Grove of Hecademus or Academus. The *Academy* was "a large enclosure of ground that was once the property of a citizen at Athens named *Academus* (some, however, say that it received its name from an ancient hero). The Academy operated until it was destroyed by *Lucius Cornelius Sulla* in 84 BC. Neoplatonists revived the Academy in the early 5th century, and it operated until AD 529, when it was closed by *Justinian I* of *Byzantium*, who saw it as a threat to the propagation of *Christianity*. Many intellectuals were schooled in the Academy, the most prominent one being Aristotle.

Throughout his later life, Plato became entangled with the politics of the city of *Syracuse*. According to Diogenes Laertius, Plato initially visited Syracuse while it was under the rule of *Dionysius*. During this first trip Dionysius's brother-in-law, *Dion* of

[Syracuse](#), became one of Plato's disciples, but the tyrant himself turned against Plato. Plato was sold into slavery and almost faced death in Cyrene, a city at war with Athens, before an admirer bought Plato's freedom and sent him home. After Dionysius's death, according to [Plato's \*Seventh Letter\*](#), Dion requested Plato return to Syracuse to tutor [Dionysius II](#) and guide him to become a philosopher king. Dionysius II seemed to accept Plato's teachings, but he became suspicious of Dion, his uncle. Dionysius expelled Dion and kept Plato against his will. Eventually Plato left Syracuse. Dion would return to overthrow Dionysius and ruled Syracuse for a short time before being usurped by [Calippus](#), a fellow disciple of Plato.

### Death

A variety of sources have given accounts of Plato's death. One story, based on a mutilated manuscript, suggests Plato died in his bed, whilst a young [Thracian](#) girl played the flute to him. Another tradition suggests Plato died at a wedding feast. The account is based on Diogenes Laertius's reference to an account by Hermippus, a third century Alexandrian. According to [Tertullian](#), Plato simply died in his sleep.

### Philosophy



Plato (left) and Aristotle (right), a detail of [The School of Athens](#), a fresco by [Raphael](#)

Aristotle gestures to the earth, representing his belief in knowledge through empirical observation and experience, while holding a copy of his [Nicomachean Ethics](#) in his hand. Plato holds his [Timaeus](#) and gestures to the heavens, representing his belief in [The Forms](#)

### Recurrent themes

Plato often discusses the father-son relationship and the "question" of whether a father's interest in his sons has much to do with how well his sons turn out. A boy in ancient Athens was socially located by his family identity, and Plato often refers to his characters in terms of their paternal and fraternal relationships. Socrates was not a family man, and saw himself as the son of his mother, who was apparently a midwife. A divine fatalist, Socrates mocks men who spent exorbitant fees on tutors and trainers for their

sons, and repeatedly ventures the idea that good character is a gift from the gods. Crito reminds Socrates that orphans are at the mercy of chance, but Socrates is unconcerned. In the *Theaetetus*, he is found recruiting as a disciple a young man whose inheritance has been squandered. Socrates twice compares the relationship of the older man and his boy lover to the father-son relationship and in the *Phaedo*, Socrates' disciples, towards whom he displays more concern than his biological sons, say they will feel "fatherless" when he is gone. In several dialogues, Socrates floats the idea that knowledge is a matter of recollection, and not of learning, observation, or study. He maintains this view somewhat at his own expense, because in many dialogues, Socrates complains of his forgetfulness. Socrates is often found arguing that knowledge is not empirical, and that it comes from divine insight. In many middle period dialogues, such as the *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus* Plato advocates a belief in the immortality of the soul, and several dialogues end with long speeches imagining the [afterlife](#). More than one dialogue contrasts knowledge and opinion, perception and [reality](#), [nature](#) and custom, and body and soul.

Several dialogues tackle questions about art: Socrates says that poetry is inspired by the [muses](#), and is not rational. He speaks approvingly of this, and other forms of divine madness (drunkenness, eroticism, and dreaming) in the *Phaedrus*, and yet in the *Republic* wants to outlaw Homer's great poetry, and laughter as well. In *Ion*, Socrates gives no hint of the disapproval of Homer that he expresses in the *Republic*. The dialogue *Ion* suggests that [Homer's Iliad](#) functioned in the ancient Greek world as the Bible does today in the modern Christian world: as divinely inspired literature that can provide moral guidance, if only it can be properly interpreted.

On politics and art, religion and science, justice and medicine, virtue and vice, crime and punishment, pleasure and pain, rhetoric and rhapsody, human nature and sexuality, love and wisdom, Socrates and his company of disputants had something to say.

## **Metaphysics**

### ***Platonic realism***

"Platonism" is a term coined by scholars to refer to the intellectual consequences of denying, as Socrates often does, the reality of the material world. In several dialogues, most notably the *Republic*, Socrates inverts the common man's intuition about what is knowable and what is real. While most people take the objects of their senses to be real if anything is, Socrates is contemptuous of people who think that something has to be graspable in the hands to be real. In the *Theaetetus*, he says such people are "eu mousoi", an expression that means literally, "happily without the muses" "In other

words, such people live without the divine inspiration that gives him, and people like him, access to higher insights about reality.

Socrates's idea that reality is unavailable to those who use their senses is what puts him at odds with the common man, and with common sense. Socrates says that he who sees with his eyes is blind, and this idea is most famously captured in his [allegory of the cave](#), and more explicitly in his description of [the divided line](#). The allegory of the cave (begins *Republic* 7.514a) is a paradoxical analogy wherein Socrates argues that the invisible world is the most intelligible ("noeton") and that the visible world ("(h)oraton") is the least knowable, and the most obscure.

Socrates says in the *Republic* that people who take the sun-lit world of the senses to be good and real are living pitifully in a den of evil and ignorance. Socrates admits that few climb out of the den, or cave of ignorance, and those who do, not only have a terrible struggle to attain the heights, but when they go back down for a visit or to help other people up, they find themselves objects of scorn and ridicule.

According to Socrates, physical objects and physical events are "shadows" of their ideal or perfect forms, and exist only to the extent that they instantiate the perfect versions of themselves. Just as shadows are temporary, inconsequential epiphenomena produced by physical objects, physical objects are themselves fleeting phenomena caused by more substantial causes, the ideals of which they are mere instances. For example, Socrates thinks that perfect justice exists (although it is not clear where) and his own trial would be a cheap copy of it.

The allegory of the cave (often said by scholars to represent Plato's own epistemology and metaphysics) is intimately connected to his political ideology (often said to also be Plato's own), that only people who have climbed out of the cave and cast their eyes on a vision of goodness are fit to rule. Socrates claims that the enlightened men of society must be forced from their divine contemplations and be compelled to run the city according to their lofty insights. Thus is born the idea of the "[philosopher-king](#)", the wise person who accepts the power thrust upon him by the people who are wise enough to choose a good master. This is the main thesis of Socrates in the *Republic*, that the most wisdom the masses can muster is the wise choice of a ruler.

The word metaphysics derives from the fact that Aristotle's musings about divine reality came after ("meta") his lecture notes on his treatise on nature ("physics"). The term is in fact applied to Aristotle's own teacher, and Plato's "metaphysics" is understood as Socrates' division of reality into the warring and irreconcilable domains of the material and the spiritual. The theory has been of incalculable influence in the history of Western philosophy and religion.

## Theory of Forms

The Theory of Forms (**Greek**: ἰδέαι) typically refers to the belief expressed by Socrates in some of Plato's dialogues, that the material world as it seems to us is not the real world, but only an image or copy of the real world. Socrates spoke of forms in formulating a **solution** to the **problem of universals**. The forms, according to Socrates, are roughly speaking **archetypes** or **abstract** representations of the many **types** of things, and properties we feel and see around us, that can only be perceived by reason (**Greek**: λογική); (that is, they are **universals**). In other words, Socrates sometimes seems to recognize two worlds: the apparent world, which constantly changes, and an unchanging and unseen world of forms, which may be a cause of what is apparent.

### Platonic Epistemology

Many have interpreted Plato as stating even having been the first to write that **knowledge is justified true belief**, an influential view that informed future developments in epistemology. This interpretation is partly based on a reading of the *Theaetetus* where in Plato argues that knowledge is distinguished from mere true belief by the knower having an "account" of the object of her or his true belief. And this theory may again be seen in the *Meno*, where it is suggested that true belief can be raised to the level of knowledge if it is bound with an account as to the question of "why" the object of the true belief is so. Many years later, **Edmund Gettier** famously demonstrated the problems of the justified true belief account of knowledge. The modern theory of justified true belief as knowledge which Gettier addresses is equivalent to Plato's is accepted by some scholars but rejected by others.

Later in the *Meno*, Socrates uses a geometrical example to expound Plato's view that knowledge in this latter sense is acquired by **recollection**. Socrates elicits a fact concerning a geometrical construction from a slave boy, who could not have otherwise known the fact (due to the slave boy's lack of education). The knowledge must be present, Socrates concludes, in an eternal, non-experiential form.

In other dialogues, the *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Republic*, and the *Parmenides*, Plato himself associates knowledge with the apprehension of unchanging Forms and their relationships to one another (which he calls "expertise" in **Dialectic**), including through the process of **More** explicitly, Plato himself argues in the *Timaeus* that knowledge is always proportionate to the realm from which it is gained. In other words, if one derives one's account of something experientially, because the world of sense is in flux, the views therein attained will be mere opinions. And opinions are characterized by a lack of



necessity and stability. On the other hand, if one derives one's account of something by way of the non-sensible forms, because these forms are unchanging, so too is the account derived from them. That apprehension of Forms is required for knowledge may be taken to cohere with Plato's theory in the *Theaetetus* and *Meno*. Indeed, the apprehension of Forms may be at the base of the "account" required for justification, in that it offers foundational knowledge which itself needs no account, thereby avoiding an [infinite regress](#).

## The state *The Republic*



*Papyrus Oxyrhynchus, with fragment of Plato's Republic*

Plato's philosophical views had many societal implications, especially on the idea of an ideal [state](#) or government. There is some discrepancy between his early and later views. Some of the most famous doctrines are contained in the *Republic* during his middle period, as well as in the *Laws* and the *Statesman*. However, because Plato wrote dialogues, it is assumed that Socrates is often speaking for Plato. This assumption may not be true in all cases.

Plato, through the words of Socrates, asserts that societies have a tripartite class structure corresponding to the appetite/spirit/reason structure of the individual soul. The appetite/spirit/reason stands for different parts of the body. The body parts symbolize the castes of society. *Protective*, which represents the chest. (Warriors or Guardians) those who are adventurous, strong and brave; in the armed forces. These correspond to the "spirit" part of the soul. *Governing*, which represents the head (Rulers or Philosopher Kings) those who are intelligent, rational, self-controlled, love wisdom, well suited to make decisions for the community. These correspond to the "reason" part of the soul and are very few.

According to this model, the principles of [Athenian democracy](#) (as it existed in his day) are rejected as only a few are fit to rule. Instead of rhetoric and persuasion, Plato says reason and wisdom should govern. As Plato puts it:

"Until philosophers rule as kings or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide, while the many natures who at present pursue either one exclusively are forcibly prevented from doing so, cities will have no rest from evils, nor, will the human race."



Plato in his academy, drawing after a painting by Swedish painter Carl Johan Wahlbom

Plato describes these "philosopher kings" as "those who love the sight of truth" and supports the idea with the analogy of a captain and his ship or a doctor and his medicine. According to him, sailing and health are not things that everyone is qualified to practice by nature. A large part of the *Republic* then addresses how the educational system should be set up to produce these philosopher kings. However, it must be taken into account that the ideal city outlined in the *Republic* is qualified by Socrates as the ideal *luxurious* city, examined to determine how it is that injustice and justice grow in a city. According to Socrates, the "true" and "healthy" city is instead the one first outlined in book II of the *Republic*, 369c–372d, containing farmers, craftsmen, merchants, and wage-earners, but lacking the guardian class of philosopher-kings as well as delicacies such as "perfumed oils, incense, prostitutes, and pastries", in addition to paintings, gold, ivory, couches, a multitude of occupations such as poets and hunters, and war.

In addition, the ideal city is used as an image to illuminate the state of one's soul, or the will, [reason](#), and [desires](#) combined in the human body. Socrates is attempting to make an image of a rightly ordered human, and then later goes on to describe the different kinds of humans that can be observed, from tyrants to lovers of money in various kinds of cities. The ideal city is not promoted, but only used to magnify the different kinds of individual humans and the state of their soul. However, the [philosopher king](#) image was used by many after Plato to justify their personal political beliefs. The philosophic soul according to Socrates has reason, will, and desires united in virtuous harmony. A philosopher has the moderate love for [wisdom](#) and the [courage](#) to act according to wisdom. Wisdom is knowledge about the [Good](#) or the right relations between all that [exists](#).

Wherein it concerns states and rulers, Plato has made interesting arguments. For instance he asks which is better a bad democracy or a country reigned by a tyrant. He argues that it is better to be ruled by a bad tyrant, than be a bad democracy (since here all the people are now responsible for such actions, rather than one individual committing many bad deeds.) This is emphasized within the *Republic* as Plato describes the event of mutiny on board a ship. Plato suggests the ship's crew to be in line with the democratic rule of many and the captain, although inhibited through ailments, the tyrant. Plato's description of this event is parallel to that of democracy within the state and the inherent problems that arise.

According to Plato, a state made up of different kinds of souls will, overall, decline from an aristocracy (rule by the best) to a **timocracy** (rule by the honorable), then to an **oligarchy** (rule by the few), then to a **democracy** (rule by the people), and finally to **tyranny** (rule by one person, rule by a tyrant). Aristocracy is the form of government (*politeia*) advocated in Plato's *Republic*. This regime is ruled by a philosopher king, and thus is grounded on wisdom and reason. The aristocratic state, and the man whose nature corresponds to it, are the objects of Plato's analyses throughout much of the *Republic*, as opposed to the other four types of states/men, who are discussed later in his work. In Book VIII, Plato states in order the other four imperfect societies with a description of the state's structure and individual character. In timocracy the ruling class is made up primarily of those with a warrior-like character. In his description, Plato has **Sparta** in mind. Oligarchy is made up of a society in which wealth is the criterion of merit and the wealthy are in control. In democracy, the state bears resemblance to ancient Athens with traits such as equality of political opportunity and freedom for the individual to do as he likes. Democracy then degenerates into tyranny from the conflict of rich and poor. It is characterized by an undisciplined society existing in chaos, where the tyrant rises as popular champion leading to the formation of his private army and the growth of oppression

### **Unwritten doctrines**

For a long time, Plato's unwritten doctrine had been controversial. Many modern books on Plato seem to diminish its importance; nevertheless, the first important witness who mentions its existence is Aristotle, who in his *Physics* writes: "It is true, indeed, that the account he gives there [i.e. in *Timaeus*] of the participant is different from what he says in his so-called *unwritten teachings* (ἀγγραφα δόγματα)." The term *ἀγγραφα δόγματ* a literally means *unwritten doctrines* and it stands for the most fundamental metaphysical teaching of Plato, which he disclosed only orally, and some say only to his most trusted fellows, and which he may have kept secret from the public. The

importance of the unwritten doctrines does not seem to have been seriously questioned before the 19th century.

A reason for not revealing it to everyone is partially discussed in [Phaedrus](#) where Plato criticizes the written transmission of knowledge as faulty, favoring instead the spoken [logos](#): "he who has knowledge of the just and the good and beautiful ... will not, when in earnest, write them in ink, sowing them through a pen with words, which cannot defend themselves by argument and cannot teach the truth effectually." The same argument is repeated in Plato's [Seventh Letter](#): "every serious man in dealing with really serious subjects carefully avoids writing." In the same letter he writes: "I can certainly declare concerning all these writers who claim to know the subjects that I seriously study ... there does not exist, nor will there ever exist, any treatise of mine dealing therewith." Such secrecy is necessary in order not "to expose them to unseemly and degrading treatment".

It is, however, said that Plato once disclosed this knowledge to the public in his lecture *On the Good* (Περὶ τῶγαθοῦ), in which the Good (τὸ ἀγαθόν) is identified with the One (the Unity, τὸ ἓν), the fundamental ontological principle. The content of this lecture has been transmitted by several witnesses among others, [Aristoxenus](#), who describes the event in the following words: "Each came expecting to learn something about the things that are generally considered good for men, such as wealth, good health, physical strength, and altogether a kind of wonderful happiness. But when the mathematical demonstrations came, including numbers, geometrical figures and astronomy, and finally the statement Good is One seemed to them, I imagine, utterly unexpected and strange; hence some belittled the matter, while others rejected it." [Simplicius](#) quotes [Alexander of Aphrodisias](#), who states that "according to Plato, the first principles of everything, including the Forms themselves are One and Indefinite Duality (ἡ ὀρίστος δυάς), which he called Large and Small one might also learn this from Speusippus and Xenocrates and the others who were present at Plato's lecture on the Good".

Their account is in full agreement with Aristotle's description of Plato's metaphysical doctrine. In [Metaphysics](#) he writes: "Now since the Forms are the causes of everything else, he [i.e. Plato] supposed that their elements are the elements of all things. Accordingly the material principle is the Great and Small [i.e. the Dyad], and the essence is the One (τὸ ἓν), since the numbers are derived from the Great and Small by participation in the One". "From this account it is clear that he only employed two causes: that of the essence and the material cause; for the Forms are the cause of the essence in everything else, and the One is the cause of it in the Forms. He also tells us

what the material substrate is of which the Forms are predicated in the case of sensible things, and the One in that of the Forms - that it is this the duality (the Dyad, ἡ δυάς), the Great and Small (τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρόν). Further, he assigned to these two elements respectively the causation of good and of evil". The most important aspect of this interpretation of Plato's metaphysics is the continuity between his teaching and the neoplatonic interpretation of [Plotinus](#) or [Ficino](#) which has been considered erroneous by many but may in fact have been directly influenced by oral transmission of Plato's doctrine. A modern scholar who recognized the importance of the unwritten doctrine of Plato was [Heinrich Gomperz](#) who described it in his speech during the 7th [International Congress of Philosophy](#) in 1930. All the sources related to the ἄγραφα δόγματα have been collected by Konrad Gaiser and published as *Testimonia Platonica*. These sources have subsequently been interpreted by scholars from the German *Tübingen School* such as Hans Joachim Krämer or Thomas A. Szlezák.

### **Dialectic**

The role of [dialectic](#) in Plato's thought is contested but there are two main interpretations; a type of reasoning and a method of intuition. Simon Blackburn adopts the first, saying that Plato's dialectic is "the process of eliciting the truth by means of questions aimed at opening out what is already implicitly known, or at exposing the contradictions and muddles of an opponent's position." A similar interpretation has been put forth by Louis Hartz, who suggests that elements of the dialectic are borrowed from [Hegel](#). According to this view, opposing arguments improve upon each other, and prevailing opinion is shaped by the synthesis of many conflicting ideas over time. Each new idea exposes a flaw in the accepted model, and the epistemological substance of the debate continually approaches the truth. Hartz's is a teleological interpretation at the core, in which philosophers will ultimately exhaust the available body of knowledge and thus reach "the end of history." Karl Popper, on the other hand, claims that dialectic is the art of intuition for "visualizing the divine originals, the Forms or Ideas, of unveiling the Great Mystery behind the common man's everyday world of appearances."

### **The Dialogues**

Thirty-six dialogues and thirteen letters have traditionally been ascribed to Plato, though modern scholarship doubts the authenticity of at least some of these. Plato's writings have been published in several fashions; this has led to several conventions regarding the naming and referencing of Plato's texts.

The usual system for making unique references to sections of the text by Plato derives from a 16th century edition of Plato's works by [Henricus Stephanus](#). An overview of Plato's writings according to this system can be found in the [Stephanus](#)

[pagination](#) article. One tradition regarding the arrangement of Plato's texts is according to [tetralogies](#). This scheme is ascribed by Diogenes Laertius to an ancient scholar and court astrologer to [Tiberius](#) named [Thrasyllus](#).

In the list below, works by Plato are marked (1) if there is no consensus among scholars as to whether Plato is the author, and if most scholars agree that Plato is *not* the author of the work. Unmarked works are assumed to have been written by Plato.

- I. *Euthyphro*, *Apology (of Socrates)*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*
- II. *Cratylus*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*
- III. *Parmenides*, *Philebus*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*
- IV. *First Alcibiades* , *Second Alcibiades* , *Hipparchus* , *(Rival) Lovers*
- V. *Theages* , *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Lysis*
- VI. *Euthydemus*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Meno*
- VII. *(Greater) Hippias (major)* , *(Lesser) Hippias (minor)*, *Ion*, *Menexenus*
- VIII. *Clitophon* , *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Critias*
- IX. *Minos* , *Laws*, *Epinomis* , *Epistles* .

The remaining works were transmitted under Plato's name, most of them already considered spurious in antiquity, and so were not included by Thrasyllus in his tetralogical arrangement. These works are labeled as *Notheuomenoi* ("spurious") or *Apocrypha*.

- *Axiochus* , *Definitions* , *Demodocus* , *Epigrams* , *Eryxias* , *Halcyon* , *On Justice*, *On Virtue*, *Sisyphus* .

### **Composition of the dialogues**

No one knows the exact order Plato's dialogues were written in, or the extent to which some might have been later revised and rewritten. [Lewis Campbell](#) was the first to make exhaustive use of [stylometry](#) to prove objectively that the *Critias*, *Timaeus*, *Laws*, *Philebus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman* were all clustered together as a group, while the *Parmenides*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, and *Theaetetus* belong to a separate group, which must be earlier (given Aristotle's statement in his *Politics* that the *Laws* was written after the *Republic*);). What is remarkable about Campbell's conclusions is that, in spite of all the stylometric studies that have been conducted since his time, perhaps the only chronological fact about Plato's works that can now be said to be proven by stylometry is the fact that *Critias*, *Timaeus*, *Laws*, *Philebus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman* are the latest of Plato's dialogues, the others earlier

Increasingly in the most recent Plato scholarship, writers are skeptical of the notion that the order of Plato's writings can be established with any precision, though Plato's works are still often characterized as falling at least roughly into three groups. The following represents one relatively common such division. It should, however, be kept in mind that many of the positions in the ordering are still highly disputed, and also that the very notion that Plato's dialogues can or should be "ordered" is by no means universally accepted.

Among those who classify the dialogues into periods of composition, Socrates figures in all of the "early dialogues" and they are considered the most faithful representations of the historical Socrates. They include *The Apology of Socrates*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Less Hippias*, *Lysis*, *Menexenus*, and *Protagoras* (often considered one of the last of the "early dialogues"). Three dialogues are often considered "transitional" or "pre-middle": *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno*.

Three dialogues are often considered "transitional" or "pre-middle": *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno*.

Whereas those classified as "early dialogues" often conclude in *aporia*, the so-called "middle dialogues" provide more clearly stated positive teachings that are often ascribed to Plato such as the *theory of forms*. These dialogues include *Cratylus*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Parmenides*, and *Theaetetus*. Proponents of dividing the dialogues into periods often consider the *Parmenides* and *Theaetetus* to come late in this period and be transitional to the next, as they seem to treat the theory of forms critically (*Parmenides*) or not at all (*Theaetetus*).

The remaining dialogues are classified as "late" and are generally agreed to be difficult and challenging pieces of philosophy. This grouping is the only one proven by stylometric analysis. While looked to for Plato's "mature" answers to the questions posed by his earlier works, those answers are difficult to discern. Some scholars say that the theory of forms is absent from the late dialogues, it's having been refuted in the *Parmenides*, but there isn't total consensus that the *Parmenides* actually refutes the theory of forms. The so-called "late dialogues" include *Critias*, *Laws*, *Philebus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Timaeus*.

### **Narration of the dialogues**

Plato never presents himself as a participant in any of the dialogues, and with the exception of the *Apology*, there is no suggestion that he heard any of the dialogues firsthand. Some dialogues have no narrator but have a pure "dramatic" form (examples: *Meno*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, *Crito*, *Euthyphro*), some dialogues are narrated by Socrates,

wherein he speaks in first person (examples: *Lysis*, *Charmides*, *Republic*). One dialogue, *Protagoras*, begins in dramatic form but quickly proceeds to Socrates' narration of a conversation he had previously with the sophist for whom the dialogue is named; this narration continues uninterrupted till the dialogue's end.



Plato's Symposium (Anselm Feuerbach, 1873)

Two dialogues *Phaedo* and *Symposium* also begin in dramatic form but then proceed to virtually uninterrupted narration by followers of Socrates. *Phaedo*, an account of Socrates' final conversation and hemlock drinking, is narrated by Phaedo to Echechrates in a foreign city not long after the execution took place. The *Symposium* is narrated by Apollodorus, a Socratic disciple, apparently to Glaucon. Apollodorus assures his listener that he is recounting the story, which took place when he himself was an infant, not from his own memory (remembered by Aristodemus), who told the story years ago.

The *Theaetetus* is a peculiar case: a dialogue in dramatic form imbedded within another dialogue in dramatic form. In the beginning of the *Theaetetus* (142c-143b), *Euclides* says that he compiled the conversation from notes he took based on what Socrates told him of his conversation with the title character. The rest of the *Theaetetus* is presented as a "book" written in dramatic form and read by one of Euclid's slaves (143c). Some scholars take this as an indication that Plato had by this date wearied of the narrated form.<sup>[71]</sup> With the exception of the *Theaetetus*, Plato gives no explicit indication as to how these orally transmitted conversations came to be written down.

### **Trial of Socrates**

The trial of Socrates is the central, unifying event of the great Platonic dialogues. Because of this, Plato's *Apology* is perhaps the most often read of the dialogues. In the *Apology*, Socrates tries to dismiss rumors that he is a *sophist* and defends himself against charges of disbelief in the gods and corruption of the young. Socrates insists that long-standing slander will be the real cause of his demise, and says the legal charges are essentially false. Socrates famously denies being wise, and explains how his life as a philosopher was launched by the *Oracle at Delphi*. He says that his quest to resolve the riddle of the oracle put him at odds with his fellow man, and that this is the reason he has been mistaken for a menace to the city-state of Athens.



If Plato's important dialogues do not refer to Socrates' execution explicitly, they allude to it, or use characters or themes that play a part in it. Five dialogues foreshadow the trial: In the *Theaetetus* and the *Euthyphro* Socrates tells people that he is about to face corruption charges. In the *Meno*, one of the men who bring legal charges against Socrates, *Anytus*, warns him about the trouble he may get into if he does not stop criticizing important people. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates says that his trial will be like a doctor prosecuted by a cook who asks a jury of children to choose between the doctor's bitter medicine and the cook's tasty treats. In the *Republic*, Socrates explains why an enlightened man (presumably himself) will stumble in a courtroom situation. The *Apology* is Socrates' defense speech, and the *Crito* and *Phaedo* take place in prison after the conviction. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates is a guest at the home of *Callias*, son of *Hipponicus*, a man whom Socrates disparages in the *Apology* as having wasted a great amount of money on sophists' fees.

### Unity and diversity of the dialogues

Two other important dialogues, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, are linked to the main storyline by characters. In the *Apology* (19b, c), Socrates says *Aristophanes* slandered him in a comic play, and blames him for causing his bad reputation, and ultimately, his death. In the *Symposium*, the two of them are drinking together with other friends. The character *Phaedrus* is linked to the main story line by character (*Phaedrus* is also a participant in the *Symposium* and the *Protagoras*) and by theme (the philosopher as divine emissary, etc.) The *Protagoras* is also strongly linked to the *Symposium* by characters: all of the formal speakers at the *Symposium* (with the exception of *Aristophanes*) are present at the home of *Callias* in that dialogue. *Charmides* and his guardian *Critias* are present for the discussion in the *Protagoras*. Examples of characters crossing between dialogues can be further multiplied. The *Protagoras* contains the largest gathering of Socratic associates.

In the dialogues Plato is most celebrated and admired for, Socrates is concerned with human and political virtue, has a distinctive personality, and friends and enemies who "travel" with him from dialogue to dialogue. This is not to say that Socrates is consistent: a man who is his friend in one dialogue may be an adversary or subject of his mockery in another. For example, Socrates praises the wisdom of *Euthyphro* many times in the *Cratylus*, but makes him look like a fool in the *Euthyphro*. He disparages sophists generally, and *Prodicus* specifically in the *Apology*, whom he also slyly jabs in the *Cratylus* for charging the hefty fee of fifty drachmas for a course on language and grammar. However, Socrates tells *Theaetetus* in his namesake dialogue that he admires

Prodicus and has directed many pupils to him. Socrates' ideas are also not consistent within or between or among dialogues.

### Platonic scholarship



"The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato." (Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 1929)

Although their popularity has fluctuated over the years, the works of Plato have never been without readers since the time they were written. Plato's thought is often compared with that of his most famous student, Aristotle, whose reputation during the Western Middle Ages so completely eclipsed that of Plato that the Scholastic philosophers referred to Aristotle as "the Philosopher". However, in the Byzantine Empire, the study of Plato continued.

The Medieval scholastic philosophers did not have access to most of the works of Plato, nor the knowledge of Greek needed to read them. Plato's original writings were essentially lost to Western civilization until they were brought from Constantinople in the century of its fall, by George Gemistos Plethon. It is believed that Plethon passed a copy of the Dialogues to Cosimo de' Medici when in 1438 the Council of Ferrara, called to unify the Greek and Latin Churches, was adjourned to Florence, where Plethon then lectured on the relation and differences of Plato and Aristotle, and fired Cosimo with his enthusiasm. During the early Islamic era, Persian and Arab scholars translated much of Plato into Arabic and wrote commentaries and interpretations on Plato's, Aristotle's and other Platonist philosophers' works (see Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Averroes, Hunayn ibn Ishaq). Many of these comments on Plato were translated from Arabic into Latin and as such influenced Medieval scholastic philosophers.

Only in the Renaissance, with the general resurgence of interest in classical civilization, did knowledge of Plato's philosophy become widespread again in the West. Many of the greatest early modern scientists and artists who broke with Scholasticism and fostered the flowering of the Renaissance, with the support of the Plato-inspired Lorenzo de Medici, saw Plato's philosophy as the basis for progress in the arts and sciences. By the 19th century, Plato's reputation was restored, and at least on par with Aristotle's.

Notable Western philosophers have continued to draw upon Plato's work since that time. Plato's influence has been especially strong in mathematics and the sciences. He helped to distinguish between [pure](#) and [applied mathematics](#) by widening the gap between "arithmetic", now called [number theory](#) and "logistic", now called [arithmetic](#). He regarded logistic as appropriate for business men and men of war who "must learn the art of numbers or he will not know how to array his troops," while arithmetic was appropriate for philosophers "because he has to arise out of the sea of change and lay hold of true being."<sup>[75]</sup> Plato's resurgence further inspired some of the greatest advances in logic since Aristotle, primarily through [Gottlob Frege](#) and his followers [Kurt Gödel](#), [Alonzo Church](#), and [Alfred Tarski](#); the last of these summarized his approach by reversing the customary paraphrase of Aristotle's famous declaration of sedition from the Academy (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1096a15), from *Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas* ("Plato is a friend, but truth is a greater friend") to *Inimicus Plato sed magis inimica falsitas* ("Plato is an enemy, but falsehood is a greater enemy"). [Albert Einstein](#) suggested that the scientist that takes philosophy seriously would have to avoid systematization and take on many different roles, but possibly appearing as a Platonist or Pythagorean, in that such a one has "the viewpoint of logical simplicity as an indispensable and effective tool of his research." Conversely, thinkers that diverged from [ontological](#) models and [moral](#) ideals in their own philosophy have tended to disparage Platonism from more or less informed perspectives. Thus [Friedrich Nietzsche](#) attacked Plato's moral and political theories, [Martin Heidegger](#) argued against Plato's alleged obfuscation of *Being*, and [Karl Popper](#) argued in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) that Plato's alleged proposal for a government system in the *Republic* was prototypically [totalitarian](#). [Leo Strauss](#) is considered by some as the prime thinker involved in the recovery of Platonic thought in its more political, and less metaphysical, form. Deeply influenced by Nietzsche and Heidegger, Strauss nonetheless rejects their condemnation of Plato and looks to the dialogues for a solution to what all three thinkers acknowledge as 'the crisis of the West.'

### **Textual sources and history**

The texts of Plato as received today apparently represent the complete written philosophical work of Plato and are generally good by the standards of [textual criticism](#). No modern edition of Plato in the original Greek represents a single source, but rather it is reconstructed from multiple sources which are compared with each other. These sources are medieval manuscripts written on vellum (mainly from 9th-13th century AD Byzantium), papyri (mainly from late antiquity in Egypt), and from the independent *testimonia* of other authors who quote various segments of the works

(which come from a variety of sources). The text as presented is usually not much different than what appears in the Byzantine manuscripts, and papyri and testimonia just confirm the manuscript tradition. In some editions however the readings in the papyri or testimonia are favoured in some places by the editing critic of the text.

In the first century AD, [Thrasylus of Mendes](#) had compiled and published the works of Plato in the original Greek, both genuine and spurious. While it has not survived to the present day, all the extant medieval Greek manuscripts are based on his edition.<sup>1</sup>

The oldest surviving complete manuscript for many of the dialogues is the Clarke Plato (Codex Oxoniensis Clarkianus 39, or Codex Boleianus MS E.D. Clarke 39), which was written in Constantinople in 895 and acquired by [Oxford University](#) in 1809. The Clarke is given the [siglum](#) *B* in modern editions. *B* contains the first six tetralogies and is described internally as being written by "John the Calligrapher" on behalf of [Arethas of Caesarea](#). It appears to have undergone corrections by Arethas himself. For the last two tetralogies and the apocrypha, the oldest surviving complete manuscript is Codex Parisinus graecus 1807, designated *A*, which was written nearly contemporaneously to *B*, circa 900 AD. *A* probably had an initial volume containing the first 7 tetralogies which is now lost, but of which a copy was made, Codex Venetus append. class. 4, 1, which has the siglum *T*. The oldest manuscript for the seventh tetralogy is Codex Vindobonensis 54. suppl. phil. Gr. 7, with siglum *W*, with a supposed date in the twelfth century. In total there are fifty-one such Byzantine manuscripts known, while others may yet be found. To help establish the text, the older evidence of papyri and the independent evidence of the testimony of commentators and other authors (i.e, those who quote and refer to an old text of Plato which is no longer extant) are also used. Many papyri which contain fragments of Plato's texts are among the [Oxyrhynchus Papyri](#). The 2003 [Oxford Classical Texts](#) edition by Slings even cites the Coptic translation of a fragment of the *Republic* in the [Nagah Hammadi library](#) as evidence. Important authors for testimony include [Olympiodorus the Younger](#), [Plutarch](#), [Proclus](#), [Iamblichus](#), [Eusebius](#), and [Stobaeus](#). During the early Renaissance, the Greek language and, along with it, Plato's texts were reintroduced to Western Europe by Byzantine scholars. In 1483 there was published a Latin edition of Plato's complete works translated by [Marsilio Ficino](#) at the behest of [Cosimo de' Medici](#). Cosimo had been influenced toward studying Plato by the many Byzantine Platonists in Florence during his day, including [George Gemistus Plethon](#). Henri Estienne's edition, including parallel Greek and Latin, was published in 1578. It was this edition which established [Stephanus pagination](#), still in use today.

### **Modern editions**

The [Oxford Classical Texts](#) offers the current standard complete Greek text of Plato's complete works. In five volumes edited by [John Burnet](#), its first edition was published 1900-1907, and it is still available from the publisher, having last been printed in 1993. The second edition is still in progress with only the first volume, printed in 1995, and the *Republic*, printed in 2003, available. The *Cambridge Greek and Latin Texts* and *Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries* series includes Greek editions of the *Protagoras*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Alcibiades*, and *Clitophon*, with English philological, literary, and, to an extent, philosophical commentary. One distinguished edition of the Greek text is [E. R. Dodds'](#) of the *Gorgias*, which includes extensive English commentary. The modern standard complete English edition is the 1997 [Hackett Plato, Complete Works](#), edited by John M. Cooper. For many of these translations Hackett offers separate volumes which include more by way of commentary, notes, and introductory material. There is also the *Clarendon Plato Series* by Oxford University Press which offers English translations and thorough philosophical commentary by leading scholars on a few of Plato's works, including [John McDowell's](#) version of the *Theaetetus*. Cornell University Press has also begun the *Agora* series of English translations of classical and medieval philosophical texts, including a few of Plato's.

**Reference: Wikipedia**