

**Philosopher Biography: Plato**

Student's Name:

Course Name and Number:

Instructor's Name:

Date Submitted:

## **Philosopher Biography: Plato**

### **Culture and Time Period that Influenced Plato's Ideas**

As a student of Socrates and a teacher to Aristotle, Plato; an ancient Greek Philosopher, explored the issues of equality, justice, beauty, aesthetics, philosophy of language, epistemology, cosmology, political philosophy, and theology in his writings. As a child of Greek aristocracy, the social class that his parents were a part of, Plato received the finest education from the finest educators. As a young boy from an elevated social class, it is highly likely that he was exposed to doctrines of Parmenides, Pythagoras, and Cratylus (Finnis, 2015). These doctrines were fundamental to his interests in the study of knowledge (epistemology) and the study of nature (Metaphysics). Two major events are seen to have changed and greatly influenced the life of Plato: The war between Sparta and Athens; Peloponnesian and his encounter with Socrates the great Greek philosopher. Although briefly, Plato served in the Peloponnesian War, which saw Spartans defeat Athens bringing an end to their democracy and replacing it with oligarchy (Bhandari, 2010).

In the new oppressive government, two of Plato's relatives served prominently, albeit as part of notorious tyrants who largely deprived rights to the citizens of Athens. When the oligarchy was finally overthrown and replaced with democracy Plato considered a career in politics. A life in politics was however never to be since when his great teacher Socrates was executed, Plato devoted his life to philosophy and study out of some degree of bitterness. Before he began his extensive writing, Plato spent 12 years travelling throughout the Mediterranean region studying religion, astronomy, geometry, and geology in Egypt, and mathematics with Pythagoreans in Italy (Finnis, 2015).

### **Plato's Contributions to the Field of Philosophy**

As a great philosopher and the founder of the Academy, a school of learning founded around 385 B.C.E., Plato made great contributions to philosophy, political theory, mathematics, biology, and

astronomy. The Academy was closed by Roman Emperor Justinian I in around 529 C.E. for fear that it was not only a threat to Christianity but also a source of paganism. Plato's school of learning, however, had the noble vision of providing future leaders with a place where they could discover how to build a better government in the city-states of Greece.

The idea of justice is given a prominent place in the philosophy of Plato. This was especially so because Plato was greatly dissatisfied by the prevailing conditions in Athens, which were degenerating and eventually resulted in the death of his teacher and friend Socrates. Due to this, Plato constantly criticized and attacked excessive individualism and amateur meddlesomeness and always recommended that an ideal be society be constructed (Bhandari, 2010). This ideal society in the perception of Plato would be ruled supremely by the justice. Justice, to Plato, was the cure of all evil in society because it is a virtue that makes people inherently good and self-consistent. Since justice is a social consciousness, Plato believed that it would make society not only inherently good but also internally harmonious (Bhandari, 2010).

### **Key Concepts and Analyses that Comprised Plato's Theories**

Scholars divide the period of Plato's writings into three main periods: the early, the middle and the late periods. The early period is classified as the time during which Plato travelled throughout the Mediterranean region, right after the death of Socrates. During this period, Plato wrote the famous 'Apology of Socrates' among other pieces such as 'Ion', 'Hippias Major, and Minor', 'Euthyphro' and 'Protagoras'. Most of the influence to Plato's writings during the early period was drawn from the teachings and philosophy of Socrates. Socrates was executed in 399 B.C.E.

In what scholars classify as the middle period, Plato wrote a prominent piece dubbed 'The Republic', which heavily reflected on the ideals of wisdom, courage, justice, and moderation of not only the society but also the individual. In 'The Republic' Plato explored philosopher kings and just

governments in a voice that was predominantly his. The third period is representative of Plato's early ideas on metaphysics assigns Socrates a rather minor role. During this period, Plato explores roles played by drama, music, dance, architecture, morality, and ethics in society (D'Angour, 2013). According to D'Angour (2013), Plato appreciated the notion of play especially in view of the background that the idea of play was shifting in classical Greece. Plato's view was indeed central to the Hellenic culture and in particular to its development. As opposed to being associated intrinsically with children, play began to assume increased cultural and literary significance, which eventually impacted education in the broader sense. This is especially so because Plato recognized that the development of children into adults largely influenced by the notion of play, thereby recommending that play be regulated for social ends (D'Angour, 2013). In his work the 'Theory of Forms', Plato made a very bold assertion by suggesting that the world as perceived through our senses is not only changeable but deceptive, implying that the world of ideas is the only constant.

### References

- Bhandari, D. R. (2010). *Plato's Concept of Justice: An Analysis*. Retrieved from Trustees of Boston University: <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Anci/AnciBhan.htm#top>
- D'Angour, A. (2013). Plato and Play: Taking Education Seriously in Ancient Greece. *American Journal of Play*, 5(3), 293-307.
- Finnis, J. (2015, November 4). *Natural Law Theories*. Retrieved from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://seop.illc.uva.nl/entries/natural-law-theories/>