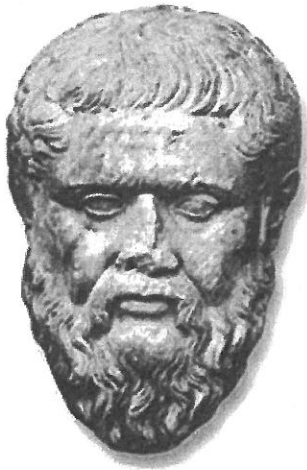


Πλάτο



The most famous of Socrates' pupils was an aristocratic young man named Plato. After the death of Socrates, Plato carried on much of his former teacher's work and eventually founded his own school, the Academy, in 385. The Academy would become in its time the most famous school in the classical world, and its most famous pupil was Aristotle.

We know much about Plato's teachings, because he wrote dialogues between Socrates and others that would explore philosophical issues. These dialogues would be used in his school as starting points for discussion; these discussions and Plato's final word on the dialogues have all been lost to us. The Platonic dialogues consist of Socrates asking questions of another and proving, through these questions, that the other person has the wrong idea on the subject ["Socratic Method"]. Initially,

Plato seems to have carried on the philosophy of Socrates, concentrating on the dialectical¹ examination of basic ethical issues: what is friendship? what is virtue? can virtue be taught? In these early Platonic dialogues, Socrates questions another person and proves, through these questions, that the other person has the wrong idea on the subject. These dialogues never answer the questions they begin with.

Plato (speaking through Socrates) divides human beings up based on their natural intelligence, strength, and courage. Those who are not overly bright, or strong, or brave, are suited to various productive professions: farming, smithing, building, etc. Those who are somewhat bright, strong, and especially courageous are suited to defensive and policing professions. Those who are extraordinarily intelligent, virtuous, and brave, are suited to run the state itself; that is, Plato's ideal state is an aristocracy, a Greek word which means "rule by the best." The lower end of human society, which, as far as Plato is concerned, consists of an overwhelming majority of people in a state, he calls the "producers," since they are most suited for productive work. The middle section of society, a smaller but still large number of people, make up the army and the police and are called "Auxiliaries." The best and the brightest, a very small and rare group, are those who are in complete control of the state permanently; Plato calls these people "Guardians." In the ideal state, "courage" characterizes the Auxiliaries; "wisdom" displays itself in the lives and government of the Guardians. A state may be said to have self-restraint ["temperance"] if the Auxiliaries obey the Guardians in all things and the Producers obey the Auxiliaries and Guardians in all things. A state may be said to be intemperate if any of the lower groups do not obey one of the higher groups. A state may be said to be just if the Auxiliaries do not simply obey the Guardians, but enjoy doing so, that is, they don't grumble about the authority being exercised over them; a just state would require that the Producers not only obey the Auxiliaries and Guardians, but that they do so willingly.