

## Plato's Work

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### Abstract

Plato's entire body of work has survived intact to this day, decisively influencing Western culture. For Plato, dialogue is the only tool capable of highlighting the research character of philosophy, the key element of his thinking. Certainly the written word is more precise and in-depth than the oral one, but the oral discourse allows an immediate exchange of views on the subject under discussion. The main protagonist of the dialogues is Socrates, except for the last dialogues where he is assigned a secondary role, disappearing completely in *Laws* and

*Epinomis*. Platonic dialogues have been grouped by many commentators in various classifications. According to some, a classification would be chronological: the first dialogues would be characterized by the strong influence of Socrates, those of maturity in which he would have developed the theory of ideas, and the last period in which he felt the need to defend his own conception from attacks on the address of his philosophy, realizing a deep self-criticism of the theory of Ideas.

**Keywords:** Plato

### **Plato's Work**

Plato's entire body of work has survived intact to this day, decisively influencing Western culture (Plato 1997) (Laertius 2018, bk. III). For Plato, dialogue is the only tool capable of highlighting the research character of philosophy, the key element of his thinking. Certainly, the written word is more precise and in-depth than the oral one, but the oral discourse allows an immediate exchange of views on the subject under discussion (Plato 1993, 275 c). The main protagonist of the dialogues is Socrates, except for the last dialogues where he is assigned a secondary role, disappearing completely in *Laws* and *Epinomis*.

David D. Cicia (Cicia 1987) considers dialectical education to be an instrument of human liberation (Freire and Macedo 2000), which must be based on accurate knowledge of the human condition in both ignorance and enlightenment and use a precise method. appropriate to the purpose. An understanding of dialectics can be reached through the "functional interpretation" of Plato (Wellman 1970). According to Klein, an interpretation of any Platonic dialogue must start from the following premises:

1. A Platonic dialogue is not a treatise or the text of a lecture, but is similar to mimes, such as those of Sofron and Xenarch.

2. The seriousness of a platonic dialogue is permeated by playfulness.

3. Readers shall be considered as silent participants in the discussions.

4. No Platonic dialogue presents Plato's thinking with complete clarity. (Klein 1977)

Favorinus said of Plato: “Modify or delete an expression from Plato's speech; no matter how skillful you make this change, you will alter the elegance.” (Aulu-Gelle 2012)

### **Classifications of works**

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The grouping of works by stylometric analysis (Barrow 2014) is considered the closest to reality; according to this analysis, the first works are generally aporias, those from the middle period offer more clearly stated positive teachings, and the “late” dialogues are characterized by a difficult and challenging philosophy.

## Chronological

Plato's works are usually grouped in the early (sometimes by some during the transition), middle, and late (Plato and Burnet 1911) (Plato et al. 1992, 142c–143b). This classification is criticized sometimes for the uncertainty and lack of absolute agreement on the true chronology (Plato 1997) (Plato et al. 1992, 142c–143b).

Starting with the year 395 BC, in the first dialogues Plato addresses the cultural problem represented by the figure of Socrates and the role of the sophists. Other aspects: ethical (rejection of revenge, favoring human happiness ("eudaimonism"), virtue is good in itself, unity among virtues, compliance with the law), psychological (wrongdoing is done out of ignorance, moral principles), religious (gods are wise and good, divination, the divine inspiration of artists, there may be an afterlife), methodological and epistemological (defining knowledge of ethical terms, examples of ethical value, connoisseurs of a particular subject do not err in their judgments on that subject).

- *Apology of Socrates*: monologue;
- *Crito*: legitimacy of laws;
- *Ion*: the meaning of human art and divine art;
- *Euthyphro*: justice and godliness;
- *Charmides*: temperance (aporia);
- *Laches*: virtue (aporia);
- *Lysis*: friendship;
- *1st Alcibiades*: true wisdom and good government;
- *2nd Alcibiades*: prayer;
- *Hippias Major*: beauty;
- *Hippias Minor*: the identity of virtue and science;

- *Menexenus*: Aspasia;
- *Protagoras*: the didactic character of virtue;
- *Gorgias*: rhetorical art.

In the middle period up to 367 BC, Plato addresses the conditions that allow the foundation of science. Clear differences in style and philosophical content from early dialogues; the discussions extend to almost all areas of research known to mankind. Topics covered: the theory of forms, immortality and reincarnation, moral psychology with a tripartite soul, justice, art criticism, platonic love.

- *Clitophon*: uncertain assignment;
- *Meno*: history;
- *Phaedo*: immortality of the soul;
- *Euthydemus*: eristic;
- *Symposium*: love;
- *Republic*: the ideal state;
- *Cratylus*: language;
- *Phaedrus*: the tripartition of the soul.

The last works were written in Athens. Topics covered: philosophical methodology, critique of the previous theory of forms, the myth of Atlantis, the creation of the Universe, the laws on which society should be organized; Socrates begins to be absent from the dialogues.

- *Parmenides*: opposite hypotheses;
- *Sophist*: sophism;
- *Theætetus*: knowledge;
- *Statesman*: politicians;

- *Timæus*: cosmology, the structure of matter and the eschatological problem;
- *Critias*: a continuation of *Timæus*, unfinished; the myth of Atlantis;
- *Philebus*: the true Good for a happy life;
- *Laws*: unfinished, published posthumously by Philip of Opunthe, who divided it into twelve books and added a final one, *Epinomis* (Laertius 2018, bk. III 37)

### Tetralogies

A common system for referring to Plato's texts is that of tetralogies, attributed by Diogenes Laërtius to Thrasyllus, a scholar and astrologer of Tiberius' court. The grammarian Thrasyllus, in the first century, by emphasizing an argumentative affinity (Mondin 2022, vol. 1 p 146), ordered the Platonic works in groups of four (tetralogies):

- *Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito, Phaedo*
- *Cratylus, Theætetus, Sophist, Statesman*
- *Parmenides, Philebus, Symposium, Phædrus*
- *1st Alcibiades, 2nd Alcibiades, Hipparchus, Lovers*
- *Theages, Charmides, Laches, Lysis*
- *Euthydemus, Protagoras, Gorgias, Meno*
- *Hippias Major, Hippias Minor, Ion, Menexenus*
- *Clitophon, Republic, Timæus, Critias*
- *Minos, Laws, Epinomis, Letters*

Other works considered false are: *Definitions, On Justice, On Virtue, Demodocus, Sisyphus, Eryxias, Axiochus, Halcyon, Epigrams* (Platone 2001)

## Trilogies

A different and older classification dates from Aristophanes of Byzantium (3rd century BC), who ordered the Platonic works into five trilogies:

- *Republic, Timaeus, Critias*
- *Sophist, Statesman, Cratylus*
- *Laws, Minos, Epinomis*
- *Theætetus, Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates*
- *Crito, Phaedo, Letters*

Dialogues admit, as ways of acquiring knowledge, memory, refutation and dialectic, and ways of exposing thinking through dialectics, myth and paradigm.

## Lexical grouping

Specialists in lexical statistics (Brandwood 1976) and the history of ideas classified Plato's dialogues into various "groups," the four main groups (Simeterre 1945) (Gill 2014, 61) being:

1. The first works (399-390): *Apology of Socrate, Crito, Protagoras, Laches.*
2. Transition period (390-385): *Meno, Gorgias, Hippias Major, Euthydemus, Lysis, Menexenus*
3. Maturity period (385-370): *Symposium, Cratylus, Phaedo, Republic, Phædrus*
4. Last period (370-345): *Parmenides, Theaetetus, Laws, Philebus, Sophist, Statesman, Timaeus, Critias.*

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