



Plato: The Great Philosopher-Educator with David Diener

Lesson 2: Plato's Educational Context

Outline:

Chapter 3: Plato's Educational Context

	Sparta	5 th Century Athens
Primary Goal of Education	The survival and prosperity of the state	The survival and prosperity of the state
Means	Turn individual citizens into indistinguishable cogs in the state's militaristic machine	Develop students <i>as holistic individuals</i> by training the student's body and mind
Provider of Education	State	Tutors contracted by the student's parents; later, schools began to be developed
Compulsory?	Yes	No
Education of Boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• State determined which were fit to enter training• Intense military training beginning at age 7• Full citizen at age 30• Training or active military service/reserve until age 60	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ages 7-18: guided through education by a <i>pedagogue</i>• Education included studies in gymnastic and music• At age 18: 2 years of military training and an examination• Full citizen at age 20
Education of Girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trained to manage a household• Trained to manage slaves• Trained physically in preparation for bearing warrior sons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No formal education• Limited participation in society outside of the domestic realm



Athenian Curriculum	
Gymnastic	Music
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wrestling• Running• Jumping• Training in warfare• Other exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Melody• Rhythm• Poetry (especially Homer)• Memorization• History• Mythology• Science• Philosophy• Moral/aesthetic cultivation

- Athenians believed that good citizens were those who were not merely trained as warriors but rather those who demonstrated *arête* in all areas of life.
- **Arête:** virtue (e.g., courage, temperance, piety, moderation, wisdom, etc. OR generally virtuous) or excellence (i.e., a thing's ability to perform its function/its purpose)
- The Athenians viewed beauty and goodness as a unified whole. They wanted students to demonstrate *arête* in all aspects of life.
- The guiding ideal: **kalokagathia** = *kalos* (beautiful) + *agathos* (good)
- Leisure, as they understood it, was not the absence of work but rather “work done for the love of it.”
- Education was not merely a necessary step for the achieving of some extrinsic goal such as the acquisition of a particular job; rather, education was understood as an activity of leisure in that students could devote themselves freely to it as an end in and of itself.
- *Scholé* (leisure) à “school”
- **The New Education:** In the later half of the 5th century, there was a shift toward more democratic political climate, which resulted in a new educational paradigm.
- Learning to speak eloquently and persuasively became essential.
- The old education was exposed as ill equipped to prepare students for civic success. A new kind of education was needed that taught citizens not primarily how to be good and beautiful, but rather how to master the *techne* of eloquent and persuasive speech.
- **The Sophists:** a group of teachers who rejected traditional moral standards and claimed that there are no universal or absolute standards for truth or goodness; They promoted the notion that what is good depends on the individual.



- “Man is the measure of all things. And thus what is true for the individual man is true. What is good for the individual man is good. There are no absolutes.” — Protagoras
- The Sophists were not concerned with teaching knowledge of the truth but with teaching the ability to win arguments and convince an audience of any proposition whatsoever.
- For the Sophists, education was merely a means to an end.

sophos (wise) à sophist

philein (to love) + *sophos* (wise) à philosopher (lover of wisdom)

- The Sophists established the necessity of higher education conducted by professionals.
- The Sophists were largely responsible for creating the background of educational thought and practice against which Plato formed his educational views.