

Plato in 90 Minutes by Paul Strathern¹

Document compiled by David von Weigel

Audio version

Title: Plato in 90 Minutes (Unabridged)

Author: Paul Strathern

Narrator: Robert Whitfield

Publisher: Blackstone Audio

Run Time: 1 Hr. 14 Min.

In an age when philosophers had scarcely glimpsed the horizons of the mind, a boy named Aristocles decided to forgo his ambitions as a wrestler. Adopting the nickname Plato, he embarked instead on a life in philosophy. In 387 B.C. he founded the Academy, the world's first university, and taught his students that all we see is not reality but merely a reproduction of the true source. And in his famous Republic he described the politics of "the highest form of state."

In Plato in 90 Minutes, Paul Strathern offers a concise, expert account of Plato's life and ideas and explains their influence on man's struggle to understand his existence in the world. The book also includes selections from Plato's work, a brief list of suggested reading for those who wish to delve deeper, and chronologies that place Plato within his own age and in the broader scheme of philosophy.

Editorial Reviews²

From Library Journal

Strathern, a graduate of Dublin's Trinity College, has lectured in philosophy and mathematics and written history, travel literature, and fiction. His attempt to provide the reader with accessible guidance to the ideas of a half dozen great names in the canon of Western philosophy fails on all counts except readability. The time given in the title for each presentation is about three times that even the least-informed reader might require, for these books are nothing but outlines. Half of each volume highlights the more peculiar details of the individual philosopher's personal life, with passing remarks about one or two substantive ideas from his work. The remaining pages include surprisingly brief quotations from the works (an epigraphic style suitable to presenting a sample of Nietzsche's writing but hardly appropriate to Kant's), chronologies (including one five-page "Philosophical Dates" that is repeated in each tiny volume), and a suggestion of four or five books for further reading. The intended audience for this series is unclear as there is too little substance to provide either the sort of introduction offered by such competing works as the Writers and Readers's illustrated

¹ "Paul Strathern: Plato in 90 Minutes (audio book, MP3, CD) - Christianaudio.com," *christianaudio - listen enjoy think grow*, http://www.christianaudio.com/product_info.php?products_id=124

² "Amazon.com: Plato in 90 Minutes (Philosophers in 90 Minutes): Paul Strathern, Robert Whitfield: Books," *amazon.com*, 2008, http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/product-description/0786192879/ref=dp_proddesc_0?ie=UTF8&n=283155&s=books

series "For Beginners" (e.g., Robert Cavalier's *Plato for Beginners*, 1990) or critical understanding of difficult concepts as Frederick Copleston and William Jones have achieved in their histories of Western thought (e.g., Copleston's *A History of Philosophy*, 1985). Strathern's publisher promises more than a dozen future volumes in this series but, given the severe limitations of the first six under review here, it is not possible to recommend that we look forward to them.

Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley P.L., Cal.

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From AudioFile

What promises to be a brisk and entertaining foray into the life of the best-known classical philosopher fizzles into a historical drone. While the author labors to keep the subject matter palatable and entertaining, and Robert Whitfield is more than equal to the task, the text lacks what it takes to feed a thirsty ear. This is particularly true on *Cassette Two*, when we lose all sense of storytelling and find ourselves in a dark wood of fact reciting. It's worth spending 90 minutes reading an actual book on Plato in this case, rather than depleting your Walkman batteries. D.J.B.

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Daryl Royster Alexander, New York Times

A godsend in this era of the short attention span. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Otto Scott's Compass, 1/1/97

Dr. Strathern manages to make philosophic peaks clear-and philosophers human....Miraculously succinct, informative and valuable books. This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Jim Holt, Wall Street Journal, 3/18/97

Witty, illuminating, and blessedly concise. This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Richard Bernstein, New York Times, 7/2/98

I find them hard to stop reading.... Well-written, clear and informed; they have a breezy wit about them.... This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Katherine A. Powers, Boston Globe 10/20/96

I cannot think of a better way to introduce oneself and one's friends to Western civilization. This text refers to the Paperback edition.

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Katherine A. Powers, Boston Globe 10/20/96

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Customer Reviews³

"Great Intro to the life of Plato", September 25, 2000

By Johannes Platonius (South Bend, Indiana)

This review is from: Plato in 90 Minutes (Philosophers in 90 Minutes) (Paperback)
This book will give anyone a better idea of Plato's life, time, ideas, and work. Although Strathern does not reflect on the concepts and work of Plato to an extent of understanding his actual Philosophy, but he rather briefly gives quotes and hints as to provide a basic overview of his outlook on the world in general. If Strathern was in fact to give a more comprehensive account of the ideas and work of Plato the whole point of compacting Plato's life into a "90 minute" book would be gone. I myself had a very minute understanding of the man Plato. But

³ "Amazon.com: Customer Reviews: Plato in 90 Minutes (Philosophers in 90 Minutes)," *amazon.com*, 2008, http://www.amazon.com/review/product/0786192879/ref=dp_top_cm_cr_acr_txt?%5Fencoding=UTF8&showVwpoints=1

from reading this book I found a lot of useful information that broadened my knowledge of the life and times of Plato. In reading this book you will meet some people that changed Plato's life, as well as the treasured wisdom Plato handed to many individuals and to the whole of society. So for the amount of time it takes to read the book in contrast with the valuable information accessible, I give this book four stars.

Plato light but not bland, January 30, 2004

By Gary Sprandel (Frankfort, Kentucky)

This review is from: Plato in 90 Minutes (Philosophers in 90 Minutes) (Paperback)
Strathern summarizes a lot of philosophy in a short book, but at time strips the meat out. This book tries to place Plato both in the context of his time and looks at the heirs of Plato in the Neoplatonists and impacts on Christianity (I thought this was a little weak). Strathern also reveals the paradoxes of Plato's life: decrying poetry but perhaps being the most poetic of the Greek philosophers and, leaning toward totalitarianism and lack of individual freedom, but being a very unique person. Strathern gives Plato 15 pages to speak for himself with selection from the Republic (of course the parable of the cave), Letters, The Law and others. Not comprehensive but worth the time!

Lacks depth... very simple, August 22, 1999

By A Customer

This review is from: Plato in 90 Minutes (Philosophers in 90 Minutes) (Paperback)
More biographical like most of the series. As regards Greeks philosophers that isn't too bad... entertaining book... but don't expect to come out of it much more "enlightened".

More about his wanderings than his wonderings., March 19, 2005

By Shalom Freedman "Shalom Freedman" (Jerusalem, Israel)

This review is from: Plato in 90 Minutes (Philosophers in 90 Minutes) (Audio CD)
This work focuses more on the life of Plato than on his thought. I would have preferred to have read a story of Plato, which traced the development of his thought through reading the 'Dialogues'. Strathern does provide a good background description of the time, and historical circumstances in which Plato lived. But he does not in my opinion make us truly understand why in Whitehead's famous phrase 'all of Western philosophy is a footnote to Plato'. He does not too when he approaches Plato's masterpiece 'The Republic' show why and how the search for the definition of 'justice' opens the way to understanding all of Plato's thought. He does however make it clear that the gift of Plato to the Western political tradition is a problematic one, as many find in Plato's prescription for a state ruled by a philosopher-king the kernel of the totalitarian dictatorships which were the great nightmares of the twentieth century.

I think he also does not make the reader aware of how 'Socratic' Plato could be about Plato. i.e. how he even in presenting his own as it were ideal vision presents it in a form where it is

questioned and made a subject for further doubt and question i.e. if it seems that Socrates asked the questions and Plato gave the answers, this is misleading. Plato also was primarily a provider of questions. It would be Aristotle who would give answers in accordance with the degree of precision he felt appropriate to each field of knowledge.

Very readable quick introduction to Plato, October 23, 2001

By A Customer

This review is from: Plato in 90 Minutes (Philosophers in 90 Minutes) (Paperback)
This book is not, and was not meant to be, an in-depth analysis of the philosophy of Plato. It is a very brief overview of his life and works. I really appreciated the subtle humour which made the book fun to read.