



# The Educational Thought of Plato's Republic and Its Enlightenment to Contemporary Education

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**Abstract:** As one of Plato's representative works, the Republic contains a large number of educational ideas, such as children's education, citizen education, lifelong education, etc., which have a profound impact on later generations and have important reference significance and research value for contemporary education. This paper first introduces Plato and his work The Republic, and explains the origin of this study. Secondly, it briefly analyzes the representative educational thoughts in the Republic, including: the analysis of rational education thoughts, the analysis of moral education thoughts, the analysis of national education thoughts, the analysis of preschool education thoughts and the analysis of comprehensive development education thoughts, which lays the groundwork for the following research; Finally, on the basis of the full analysis of Plato's education thought in the Republic, combined with the current situation of China's education, this paper focuses on the important enlightenment to today's education work, including: to highlight the importance of family education, pay attention to children's early education; We should pay more attention to the cultivation of excellent talents with all-round development. It is necessary to perfect the educational mechanism and promote educational equity. We should build a lifelong education system with Chinese characteristics. We should attach importance to promoting the development of social education.

**Keywords:** Plato, The Republic, Educational Thought, Contemporary Education, Enlightenment

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## 1. Research Origin

Plato is one of the greatest philosophers and thinkers in ancient Greek philosophy and in Western philosophy as a whole. [1] Plato was born in Athens, studied under Socrates, and devoted himself to philosophy. Around 387 B. C., Plato established the Akademi Academy in Athens, with the aim of building an ideal city-state and training its governing talents with philosophical literacy. During this period, Plato wrote a large number of books. The Republic is one of the most representative of them. Plato's Republic, Rousseau's Emile and Dewey's Democracy and Education are regarded as three milestone works in the development of educational thought. The Republic involves a large number of educational thoughts, involving all levels in the field of education, and fully demonstrates Plato's unique educational view and vision. All these have important enlightenment significance for the development of today's education work. Therefore, this paper

tries to explore the educational thought of Plato's Republic and its enlightenment to contemporary education. [2]

## 2. A Brief Description of Plato's Representative Educational Thoughts in the Republic

The Republic is a classic educational work that lays the foundation for the development of human civilization. The Republic contains many educational ideas, among which the most representative educational ideas are briefly described [3]:

### 2.1. Rational Educational Thought

Analyzing from the psychological level, reason, passion and desire are the three major components of the mind. [4] Rationality refers to the ability of human beings to learn and think, which is the essential difference between humans and

animals. [5] Plato believed that with the increase of knowledge, intelligence will gradually improve, rational thinking consciousness should be formed under the guidance of knowledge goals, and mental ability should be continuously enhanced. In the process of human growth, digital, geography, astronomy and other disciplines are also essential. Plato believed that in the process of cultivating people's philosophical thinking, Socrates' dialectics could play an important role, which was conducive to enhancing human's critical thinking ability and producing the effect of analogy in the process of knowledge learning. If people can dialectics, they can deeply think and analyze the truth and truly understand its connotation. Therefore, in order to grasp the truth and be truly good, we should build a rational education system under the support of dialectics.

## **2.2. Moral Education Thought**

Plato always attached great importance to moral education. He explored the content and realization of moral education from three aspects. [6] Firstly, the character of children is obviously different from that of adults. Psychological education should be carried out in a way that children can accept on the basis of grasping the psychological characteristics of children. Secondly, in the process of moral education, environmental education is an effective way. Parents should appear in front of their children with a good image and exert a gentle influence on them. Third, education should reflect the unity and coherence, to unify the educational concept. In his opinion, moral education includes sports and music, sports can strengthen the bones and bones, music can shape the mind, physical education can make students physically stronger, can overcome difficulties, hard work of mental strength, can persevere in a job, music education can let people master the skills of distinguishing beauty and ugliness, gradually have a good personality. Spiritual cultivation and physical education focus on music and physical education respectively. The organic integration of the two kinds of education can play a complementary role and lay the foundation for the sustainable development of children. [7] Plato pointed out that education should not only enable people to master survival skills and communication skills, but also guide people to form good moral character and noble integrity, so as to be a person with ideals, pursuits and kindness.

## **2.3. National Educational Thought**

Plato had strong feelings for his family and country, paid close attention to current affairs, and was willing to contribute his whole life to the development of mankind. He believed that education can play an irreplaceable role in social inheritance and development and national stability. He clearly pointed out that education and politics are inextricably linked. The purpose of education is to train more outstanding talents, and only by increasing the pool of talents can a country become strong. It can be seen that the rise and fall of a country is inevitably related to education. Plato believed that whether the people could live and work in peace and contentment and whether the

country could enjoy harmony and prosperity depended on whether the rulers had good philosophical literacy, whether they could control the country through effective means, and whether they had the ability to protect the country. In his opinion, in order to realize the vision of prosperity of justice and early political development, rulers must possess good philosophical thinking, which is also the fundamental goal of education. Plato believed that the ruler must have a sincere patriotism, to safeguard the national interests, to have a broad and selfless heart, the perseverance to fight bravely, the heart of kindness, in order to lead the whole country steadily forward, conquer the hearts of all people.

## **2.4. Pre-School Education Thought**

Plato was the first person to put forward the idea of preschool education in the history of western education. [8] Plato regards preschool education as the initial education of a person and emphasizes that the direction of education received by an individual from an early age will have an impact on his future development direction and even determine his future goal direction. Plato stressed that children's education should be as early as possible, and children should be guided to form a deep impression of good things through good moral education when their personalities are not yet shaped.

## **2.5. Develop Educational Ideas in an All-Round Way**

The thought of all-round development put forward by Plato in the Republic emphasizes the simultaneous development of body and mind. [9] And this development needs to be realized through physical education and music education. [10] Plato affirmed the important role of education in the growth and development of individuals, proposed the cultivation of all-round development of people, and then put forward the idea of all-round development. Through the combination of music and sports in education, individuals can eventually grow into well-developed citizens in all aspects, such as morality, intelligence, physical fitness, the United States and labor.

# **3. The Important Enlightenment of Plato's Educational Thought in the Republic to Contemporary Education**

Many of Plato's educational thoughts are covered in the Republic. [11] In the Republic, Plato presents what he considers to be his ideal vision of a complete educational system. Through the in-depth thinking of Plato's educational thought and the combination of contemporary educational work in various stages, this paper reveals the important enlightenment of Plato's educational thought in the Republic to contemporary education:

## **3.1. Highlight the Importance of Family Education and Attach Importance to Children's Early Education**

In The Republic, Plato lays great emphasis on the early

education of children. In the early education process, parents should focus on the cultivation of moral qualities, let children master the way to distinguish right from wrong, and enhance the ability to resist bad temptations. Parents should not only attach importance to family education, but also continue to improve the ways and methods, promote democracy and equality, freedom and harmony, can not spoil children without principles, and can not put forward too strict requirements. In addition, parents in the process of family education to practice, to do a good example for the child, to do "words must be done, action must be done", through their own words and deeds to positively affect the child, become the most important guide on the road of children's growth, leading the child step by step to a bright future.

### ***3.2. Pay Attention to the Cultivation of All-Round Development of Outstanding Talents***

With the progress of society and the rapid development of economy, the drawbacks of traditional exam-oriented education are increasingly exposed, which is not conducive to the all-round development of individual students, but also conducive to the cultivation of outstanding talents who meet the requirements of economic and social development and national construction. Plato pointed out that education can not only mechanically instill knowledge, but should cultivate students' various abilities, especially the ability to innovate. In his opinion, to promote the development of students from the aspects of intelligence and aesthetics, we should not only lead children to learn cultural knowledge, but also exercise children's experience, cultivate their good moral quality and artistic accomplishment. This is similar to the quality education advocated in our country at present. Quality education is based on improving the quality of our people, and we should especially improve the moral standard of students, cultivate their aesthetic interest and creative ability, so that all children can abide by laws and regulations, lay stress on social morality, and possess good aesthetic ability. Therefore, schools should change the traditional educational concept, pay attention to the accumulation of students' knowledge, but also to the improvement of practical ability, pay better attention to the cultivation and improvement of students' comprehensive quality, through the combination of both inside and outside the classroom, online and offline, form a talent cultivation model conducive to the all-round development of students, and truly improve the quality of talent training. Responding to the needs of economic and social development and national construction for all-round development of talents.

### ***3.3. Improve Educational Mechanisms and Promote Equity in Education***

Plato pointed out that there is no gender difference in human talent, men and women have the right to receive education, and there should be no gender discrimination in the field of education, which plays an important role in guiding the value of contemporary women's education, employment and entrepreneurship. Contemporary education is an

important part of the public sphere. The importance of state investment should be emphasized, the principle of equity should be permeated into all education policies, and gender equality should be fully reflected in the process of developing education. In the process of pursuing educational equity, we should pay attention to the development of education in remote and backward areas. In recent years, China has attached great importance to the development of education in remote and backward areas, continuously increased investment, provided diversified assistance to students, and effectively improved students' learning and living conditions, but it is still unable to compete with developed areas. Therefore, the state should continue to improve the educational mechanism, safeguard the equality of education, and ensure that the right to education of all school-age children can be safeguarded.

### ***3.4. Build a Lifelong Education System with Chinese Characteristics***

Plato advocated lifelong learning and believed that all countries should take education as an important cause. This view has helped promote the development of education. To achieve the goal of lifelong education, families, schools and society should play their roles. Moral and compulsory education should be carried out unswervingly, and students should be guided to acquire rich cultural knowledge, develop excellent skills, and have good habits and noble qualities. Teachers should realize that university is not the only place to train talents, and should train scientific and technological talents and innovative talents in various ways. In the process of education, the advantages of higher education are irreplaceable by other education channels. It is not only necessary for students to obtain graduation certificates, but also to promote the improvement of their comprehensive quality and become compound talents. [12]

In *The Republic*, Plato's life education plan for philosophers intuitively reflects his idea of lifelong education. The so-called lifelong education refers to the sum of all kinds of education received in a person's life, and there are differences in education at different stages. [13] Therefore, lifelong education is also a unified synthesis of different types of education. Plato emphasized that education should not be limited to school education, but should cover all kinds of education throughout a person's life. At present, the idea of lifelong education has been recognized by educators in many countries and at the national level, and has become an educational trend of thought with international influence. In the face of increasingly fierce competition at home and abroad, if a person wants to be based on the world, he must continue to strengthen learning, in line with the concept and spirit of "never too old to learn", take the initiative to contact with new knowledge and new skills, and apply the new knowledge and new skills to specific practice. In recent years, China attaches great importance to strengthening the construction of lifelong education system, emphasizing the full integration of different education subjects such as society, family and school to build

a lifelong education system with Chinese characteristics, which is of great significance for people to form the concept of lifelong learning.

### 3.5. Attaching Importance to Promoting Social Education Work

The cultivation of "philosopher Kings" advocated by Plato in the Republic is actually a kind of elite education, which runs counter to the educational goal advocated by China. [14] However, Plato still has some educational thoughts which can enlighten the reform of our country's educational field. [15] Among them, some of Plato's discourse on citizen's thought has some influence on social harmony, order stability and national prosperity. Plato emphasized that the goal of civic education is to cultivate sage Kings with perfect wisdom, moral character and leadership ability, who can bring prosperity, stability and development to the country, and the way to achieve this goal is to carry out material, moral and intellectual education. Although we do not agree with meritocratic education, we do agree with well-rounded education for citizens. Among them, the purpose of moral education is to guide citizens to form correct morality, values and moral standards, while the education of knowledge is to promote citizens to acquire sufficient knowledge reserves and have good thinking ability. Material education emphasizes all kinds of life, body and health skills that narrative should master to make it healthy, safe and long living. In today's education, it is necessary to improve public education institutions so that citizens can have equal opportunities to receive education, and at the same time enable citizens to acquire different knowledge and skills at different stages, which is of great significance for the growth of citizens' own ability and the improvement of their ability to serve the society. At the same time, civic education is not static, but continuous improvement and perfection in concrete practice, to cultivate citizens' comprehensive quality and social responsibility, and promote the harmonious development of society.

## 4. Epilogue

In the long history of Western education, Plato was the first scholar who systematically analyzed and discussed the idea of education. Plato's in-depth research on preschool education, all-round development, phased education and other fields and the research results achieved have made great contributions to national construction and human progress. Up to now, Plato's rich educational thought is still shining brightly and has a high reference significance. Therefore, in the various stages of education in our country, we should combine the actual situation of education, scientifically select and apply some of Plato's advanced ideas on education, scientific improvement of educational concepts

and educational methods, focus on the healthy growth and all-round development of students, and cultivate high-quality and all-round talents for the society.

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