

STATEMENTS THAT PLATO NEVER MADE!

My general advice: When you see a quotation attributed to a philosopher, unless someone gives the name of the work (and in Plato's case, the line numbers), you should be skeptical that the philosopher actually made the statement and do not pass on the quotation to anyone else, or read the quotation at a wedding or a business meeting to try to seem learned. (An exception to this rule would be a scholarly paper, written by an expert in the field.) Without further ado, here are quotations that Plato did not make, based on a search performed on a searchable online database of Plato's work, and a reading of all the dialogues (including ones deemed inauthentic) and his letters. *Note: I am not bothering to check for and mention every single instance of these falsely attributed quotations. Moreover, I assure you that at the time that I gave the link(s) to where I found these quotations, that it was there at that time. After adding other quotations to this list, I've discovered that some of the sites are removing the quotations, which is a good thing. However, I am not going to constantly update and investigate whether the quotation(s) are still there. Please see this as a statement that I have been made aware by at least one website that they are claiming that Plato states or believes something that he did not write (to the best of my knowledge), whether or not it still appears on the web at this point.*

(1) "We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light." This one is repeated multiple times at these sites, for instance:

<http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/25669.html>

<http://www.memorable-quotes.com/plato,a65.html>

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/p/plato.html>

<https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

[It's even on a T-shirt:] <http://t-shirts.cafepress.com/item/plato-dark-tshirt/80727557>

(2) "Only the dead have seen the end of war."

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

Here is a highly likely explanation of this quotation's non-Platonic source: <http://plato-dialogues.org/faq/faq008.htm>

Here are two (# 3 and #4) that you can get T-Shirts, mugs, etc. made with quotations that Plato did not write: <http://www.spaceandmotion.com/philosophy-shop/ancient-greek-philosophy-posters-t-shirts.htm>

(3) "You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation."

This is very uncharacteristic of Plato, given that he holds that dialectic (conversing to try to understand the essence of things, questioning assumptions, etc.) is the best part of philosophy, and it's modeled in the dialogue form itself.

Found, e.g., here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(4) "He was a wise man who invented beer."

Besides the fact that he never uses the word beer in the dialogues, Plato doesn't really think anything can be truly invented anyway - there is a Form of Beer, according to Plato, which humans can discover. In fact, according to the ancient biographer Diogenes Laertius, Plato supposedly,

"... advised those who got drunk to view themselves in a mirror; for they would then abandon the habit which so disfigured them. To drink to excess was nowhere becoming, he used to say, save at the feasts of the god who was the giver of wine." (*Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, III.39)

Found here: <http://message.snopes.com/showthread.php?t=12404>

(5) "People are like dirt. They can either nourish you and help you grow as a person or they can stunt your growth and make you wilt and die."

This one is found here (and elsewhere): <http://thinkexist.com/quotes/plato/>
<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/308591-people-are-like-dirt-they-can-either-nourish-you-and>

(6) "Wise men speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something."

Found here: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/p/plato109439.html>

(7) "Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and to everything."

Found here: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/p/plato109438.html>

Interestingly, Plato does say something like this, here: "education in music and poetry is most important ... because rhythm and harmony permeate the inner part of the soul more than anything else, affecting it most strongly and bringing it grace, so that is someone is properly educated in music and poetry, it makes him graceful, but if not, then the opposite. [And] because anyone who has been properly educated in music and poetry will sense it acutely when something has been omitted from a thing and when it hasn't been finely crafted or finely made by nature." (*Republic* III 401d-e) Why not just quote something Plato actually said? :)

(8) "Human behavior flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge."

Found here: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/p/plato38673.html>

(9) "We are twice armed if we fight with faith."

Found here: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/p/plato159576.html>
<https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(10) "Every heart sings a song, incomplete, until another heart whispers back. Those who wish to sing always find a song. At the touch of a lover, everyone becomes a poet."

Found here: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/p/plato394857.html>

(11) "Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the laws."

Found here: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/p/plato161536.html>

(12) "Music is the movement of sound to reach the soul for the education of its virtue."

Found here: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/p/plato159582.html>

Plato does have the phrase "movement of sound", here (and see the (real) Plato quotation under #7, above): "Acuteness and quickness, whether in body or soul or in the movement of sound, and the imitations of them which painting and music supply, you must have praised yourself before now, or been present when others praised them." (*Statesman* 306c-d)

(13) "Poetry is nearer to vital truth than history." But he did state, "poets as a class are divinely gifted and are inspired when they sing" (*Laws* III 682a).

Found here: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/142026-poetry-is-nearer-to-vital-truth-than-history>

(14) "I have hardly ever known a mathematician who could reason." This is definitely not something that Plato would say, since, it is said that he had a phrase over the entrance to his Academy, which read, "Let none ignorant of geometry enter here" (from Aeg. Menagius' *The Lives of the Ancient Philosophers*, [here](#), p. 153), not to mention his putting mathematics just beneath dialectic as the highest studies which a human should undertake, in his Divided Line Analogy (*Republic* VI 510d-511d).

Found here: <http://kwize.com/Plato-quotes>

(15) "Wise men speak because they have something to say; Fools because they have to say something." This sounds nice, but cannot be found in the database.

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(16) "Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the law."

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(17) "Science is nothing but perception." At opposed to most of these quotations, this one is tricky and requires some explanation. First, the Greek word *episteme* is translated either as knowledge or science, so these words do occur in Plato: "knowledge is nothing but perception" or "knowledge is simply perception," at *Theaetetus* 151e. However, the context is this: Theaetetus is the interlocutor (guy who's speaking to the character Socrates), and he proposes this definition of knowledge to Socrates, who spends the next few pages arguing that this definition of knowledge is unsatisfactory, and so they both reject it as not being true.

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(18) "Love is the joy of the good, the wonder of the wise, the amazement of the Gods." This is another tricky one, because I actually found the last two phrases (exactly as

worded), but not the first phrase. Here is the most closely worded version of part of this quotation, from the *Symposium*:

This [Love] is he who empties men of disaffection and fills them with affection, who makes them to meet together at gatherings such as sacrifices, feasts, dances, where he is our lord—who sends courtesy and sends away discourtesy, who gives kindness ever and never gives unkindness; gracious and good, the wonder of the wise, the amazement of the gods ; desired by those who have no part in him, and precious to those who have the better part in him; parent of delicacy, luxury, desire, fondness, softness, grace; regardful of the good, regardless of the evil: in every word, labour, wish, fear—saviour, pilot, comrade, warrior, glory of gods and men, leader best and brightest: in whose footsteps let every man follow, sweetly singing in his honour and joining in that sweet strain with which love charms the souls of gods and men alike. (*Symposium* 197d-e; Jowett translation)

Incidentally, Jowett's translations are, in my opinion, the worst translations of Plato of any of which I am aware. I'd recommend literally any other translation available. Almost all of the translations you find online or cheaply on Amazon.com are almost always those of Jowett, which isn't helpful, but there's that whole copyright issue.

Here is another translation (note how different this is):

Love fills us with togetherness and drains all of our divisiveness away. Love calls gatherings like these together. In feast, in dances, and in ceremonies, he gives the lead. Love moves us to mildness, removes from us wildness. He is giver of kindness, never of meanness. Gracious, kindly—let wise men see and gods admire! Treasure to lovers, envy to others, father of elegance, luxury, delicacy, grace, yearning, desire. Love cares well for good men, cares not for bad ones. In pain, in fear, in desire, or speech. Love is our best guide and guard; he is our comrade and our savior. Ornament of all gods and men, most beautiful leader and the best! Every man should follow Love, sing beautifully his hymns, and join with him in the song he sings that charms the mind of god or man. (*Symposium* 197d-e; Nehamas/Woodruff translation)

Regarding the first phrase of the quotation (“Love is the joy of the good”), it should also be said that Plato (via the character Socrates) definitely thinks positively of love. For example, he states, “I say of Love that he is first the fairest and best in himself, and then the cause of what is fairest and best in all other things.” (*Symposium* 197c)

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(19) “The greatest wealth is to live content with little.” This is something that Plato would agree with in principle, but I cannot find it in the database. Here is, however, a quotation that is near to the thought of the quotation. It is a prayer that the character Socrates makes in the *Phaedrus*: “Dear Pan, and all ye other gods that dwell in this place, grant that I may become fair within, and that such outward things as I have may not war against the spirit within me. May I count him rich who is wise, and as for gold, may I possess so much of it as only a temperate man might bear and carry with him.” (*Phaedrus* 279c)

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(20) “The first and greatest victory is to conquer yourself; to be conquered by yourself is of all things most shameful and vile.” This is Plato-like, but I can’t find it in the database. Here is the closest thing I can find to these ideas:

But of all faults of soul the gravest is one which is inborn in most men, one which all excuse in themselves and none therefore attempts to avoid – that conveyed in the maxim that ‘everyone is naturally his own friend,’ and that it is only right and proper that he should be so, whereas, in truth, this same violent attachment to self is the constant source of all manner of misdeeds in every one of us. The eye of love is blind where the beloved is concerned, and so a man proves a bad judge of right, good, honor, in the conceit that more regard is due to his personality than to the real fact, whereas a man who means to be great must care neither for self nor for its belongings, but for justice, whether exhibited in his own conduct, or rather in that of another. From this same fault springs also that universal conviction that one’s own folly is wisdom, with its consequences that we fancy we know everything when we know as good as nothing, refuse to allow others to manage business we do not understand, and fall into inevitable errors in transacting it for ourselves. Every man, then, must shun extreme self-love and follow ever in the steps of his better, undeterred by any shame for his case (*Laws* V 731d-732b).

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(21) “The measure of a man is what he does with power.” The closest thing in Plato that I can think of that relates to this is the Ring of Gyges’ story in *Republic* II 359+, where the just person would not be immoral, even if he or she could never be discovered (by being invisible via the ring).

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(22) “All men are by nature equal, made all of the same earth by one workman.”

This is something Plato definitely does not believe, given the “Noble lie” he wants to tell to children in the ideal state; namely, that there are three natures of human beings: gold (philosopher-rulers), silver (soldiers), and bronze/iron (artisans/producers). (*Republic* III 414b-415c)

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(23) “Honesty is for the most part less profitable than dishonesty.” This is another case of a character (Glaucon) who is speaking to Socrates (who represents Plato’s view), stating something that Plato doesn’t believe. Actually, more interestingly, Glaucon himself (in this case) doesn’t even believe this claim is true, because he introduces this claim with, “they say ...”. Here is the context:

Once more, Socrates, I will ask you to consider another way of speaking about justice and injustice, which is not confined to the poets but is heard in daily life. The universal voice of mankind is always declaring that justice and virtue are honourable, but grievous and toilsome; and that the pleasures of vice and injustice are easy of attainment, and are only censured by law and opinion. They say also that honesty is for the most part less profitable than dishonesty; and they are quite ready to call wicked men happy, and to honour them both in public and private when they are rich or in any other way influential, while they despise and overlook those who may be weak and poor, even though acknowledging them to be better than the others. (*Republic* II 363e-364a)

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(24) “For a man to conquer himself is the first and noblest of all victories.”

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(25) “If a man neglects education, he walks lame to the end of his life.” This is of the kind of quotation that is Plato-like, but not literally what he says. So why not look at what he actually wrote:

Therefore we say that gold and silver ought not to be allowed in the city, nor much of the vulgar sort of trade which is carried on by lending money, or rearing the meaner kinds of livestock; but only the produce of agriculture, and only so much of this as will not compel us in pursuing it to neglect that for the sake of which riches exist,—I mean, soul and body, which without gymnastics, and without education, will never be worth anything; and therefore, as we have said not once but many times, the care of riches should have the last place in our thoughts. (*Laws* V 743d-e)

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(26) “Life must be lived as play.” This is one that can be seen as Plato-like, but he didn’t say it exactly in these words. He claims, for instance, that, “man, as we said before, has been created as a toy for God; and that this is the great point in his favor. So every man and every woman should play this part and order their whole life accordingly ...” (*Laws* VII 803c) Also:

Our nurslings, too, must be of the poet's mind. They must believe that what we have said has been sufficient for its purpose, and that, for the rest, they will be visited by promptings, superhuman and divine, as to their sacrifices and dances, suggestions as to the several gods in whose honor, and the several times at which, they are to play their play, win heaven's favor for it, and so live out their lives as what they really are—puppets in the main, though with some touch of reality about them, too. (*Laws* VII 804a-b)

But this isn’t exactly what the quoted phrase is saying, and should be put in context.

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(27) **“There are two things a person should never be angry at, what they can help, and what they cannot.”** This is something with which a Stoic, such as Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius believes to be true, but I cannot find it in Plato.

Found here: <https://www.geckoandfly.com/18829/famous-philosophy-quotes-plato-love-politics-knowledge-power/>

(28) **“Someday, in the distant future, our grandchildren's grandchildren will develop a new equivalent of our classrooms. They will spend many hours in front of boxes with fires glowing within. May they have the wisdom to know the difference between light and knowledge.”**

Found here: <http://thinkexist.com/quotation/someday-in-the-distant-future-our-grandchildrens/406616.html>

(29) **“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a harder battle.”**

Found here: <http://thinkexist.com/quotes/plato/2.html>

(30) **“I know not how I may seem to others, but to myself I am but a small child wandering upon the vast shores of knowledge, every now and then finding a small bright pebble to content myself with.”**

Found here: <http://thinkexist.com/quotes/plato/2.html>

(31) **“Apply yourself both now and in the next life. Without effort, you cannot be prosperous. Though the land be good, You cannot have an abundant crop without cultivation.”**

Found here: <http://thinkexist.com/quotes/plato/3.html>

Please let me know if you are aware of others or if you find these quotations in other translations.

The whole point of this page is to get it right. Thanks!

Dr. Dave Yount (david.yount@mesacc.edu)