

Prof. Rex Li's Writings

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Title: Ten Great Insights of Plato and its Present-Day Relevance

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Summary/ Abstract: All western philosophy and ideas start from Plato. I can see lots of present-day relevance.

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Ten Great Insights of Plato and its Present-Day Relevance

Plato's Insights	Present-day Relevance
1. Communism for state guardians only (an impossible dream)	(1) Plato was quite contemplative to suggest state guardians to live in communism, without personal wealth and personal spouse. That becomes an impossible dream for it is against human nature (no family, no possessions, but full power). (2) In 20 th century we saw the failure of mass experiment on communist ideals in USSR and China. (3) See the bestseller <i>Road to Serfdom</i> (1945) and the common wisdom: Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Right now, the idea of state guardians can be a dangerous concept leading to despotism.
2. Equal opportunity for all (including women).	It is the golden principle of education in 20 th century.
3. Education / training for year 0 – 50.	Now it is life-long education/ training.
4. Darwinian evolution/ Nietzsche's power.	Some of Plato's ideas are echoed in Darwin and Nietzsche. (more review needed)
5. Democracy doesn't work – let elites rule (ruled by the wisest/ philosopher-kings).	(1) Democracy leads to Nazism, populism, Trumpian chaos. Some argue that "ruled by the people" doesn't work and "ruled by the elitists/ wisest" is a better alternative. But then this is against Lincoln's principles of "rule by the people". (2) The fact is that in the Western world the elites rule in the name of democracy, to be rectified by the people. It is now a combination of elitist and democratic rule.
6. Function of religion and belief in one single God.	Christianity still serves important functions in unifying many Western countries.
7. Justice = social good = harmony.	The present-day theory of justice starts from human rights and equality, not harmony.
8. Utopia and simple living.	Today we can live in much abundance. Utopia as social engineering may lead to catastrophe and despotism.

Plato's Insights	Present-day Relevance
9. Eugenic society/ population control.	In 1798, Thomas Malthus wrote about population growth and problems. In early 20 th century, there was a eugenic movement, only to be discredited by its practice/ endorsement of Nazi Germany. The present-day problems are: (a) some people nurture intelligences with diets and supplements; (b) Genetic manipulation, genome editing, and reproductive technology are available to produce super-babies.
10. Power politics / Naval power	Then it was power politics among Greek states, the Mediterranean and Asia minor. Today, international power politics continue on a global scale.