

## Socrates in Athens

2,400 years ago in the city-state of Athens, in 399 BC, Socrates spent his final day in a prison cell conversing with his closest friends on the immortality of the soul. At sunset he bid them farewell, received the cup of hemlock from the guard and drank as if it meant nothing. His demeanour and dignity were inspiring and have long since passed into legend. He had been accused falsely of corrupting the youth of Athens and of impiety, and was found guilty. He was 70.

This was the Socrates who, years earlier, the Oracle at Delphi had declared the wisest of men. Socrates was perplexed, for Athens was full of men wiser than he, or so he thought. Yet the Oracle cannot lie. He spent the rest of his life testing this riddle by seeking out someone – anyone – wiser than himself.

One by one he went to those in Athens who had a reputation for knowledge. His close questioning revealed their so-called knowledge to be spurious and full of error. None really knew what they thought they did, none were wise, and their ignorance was exposed. Eventually Socrates came to the conclusion that he alone was wise because he was the only one who realised that he knew little or nothing. The Oracle was vindicated.

## Plato and the Academy

Plato was 28 when Socrates died, an event that changed his life. Although an aristocrat by birth, he was a devoted follower of Socrates and philosophy, the love of wisdom. He began writing his famous philosophical dialogues in which Socrates is the hero of nearly all of them.

Socrates wrote nothing, apparently. Almost everything we know about him comes from what Plato tells us. The dialogues deal with many subjects including politics, education, rhetoric, love, life and death, and of course philosophy. Love of wisdom and truth, a masterly and easy prose style and a keen sense of drama are the hallmarks of Plato. It is astonishing that all his dialogues have survived and are readily available today to everyone in good translations.



**I knew nothing about Plato until today, now I'm definitely a fan: it's so interesting."**

**VISITOR**

Some years after the death of Socrates, Plato bought a house and garden in a public park called Academia on the outskirts of Athens and founded a school there. The school took its name from the park – the Academy. It soon became a centre of learning, drawing men from afar in pursuit of wisdom and truth. Aristotle was a pupil. Plato lived 80 years; his Academy in Athens lasted 800.

## Platonic Tradition

The Platonic tradition spread from Athens and schools were established across the ancient world. The most influential of these was at Alexandria in Egypt. Cicero, the Roman writer and orator, attended such a school and he regarded Plato as *"the wisest of all men, the most learned of all philosophers"*.

The Platonic tradition had a profound effect on Medieval Europe. John Scottus Eriugena, the 9th century Irish scholar in the French Court of King Charles the Bald, was the leading Platonist of his day; the tradition which he founded gave rise to Platonic schools in Paris and Chartres. A Platonic Academy came into being in Renaissance Florence. Prof. John Dillon of Trinity College, Dublin, is a world authority on Plato and the neo-Platonists. He has been an honoured guest at many of our Plato Days. In 2009 he was elected to the Academy at Athens, a worthy honour.

Why read Plato today? Because, says Scott Buchanan, editor of *The Portable Plato\**, *"...the reading of Plato's dialogues by a large number of people could make the difference between a century of folly and a century of wisdom for the world. Reading The Republic has made that difference at various times of crisis in the past"*.

\* *The Portable Plato*, Penguin Classics, available in paperback from bookshops and through Amazon.

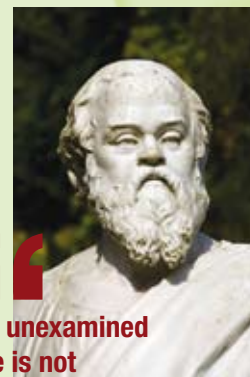
23rd year of

# A DAY WITH PLATO

**CORK,  
AMBASSADOR HOTEL**

**Sunday 9th May 2010**

**9.30 am to 5.30 pm**



**An unexamined life is not worth living"**

**SOCRATES**

*A Day With Plato* is a celebration of the wisdom of Socrates as handed down to us through the writings of Plato. This stimulating and highly enjoyable day introduces you to the words of Socrates in a friendly and easy atmosphere.

**This is a day for everyone.  
No prior knowledge of Plato is required.**

**Admission: €50 per person**

**Presented by the School of Philosophy and Economic Science**  
49 Northumberland Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. Tel 660 3788

The School is a registered educational charity (CHY 5791)



## A Day for Everyone

*A Day With Plato* is a day for everyone, regardless of qualifications. No prior knowledge or study of Plato is required.

All that's needed is a willingness to enter into the spirit of the day. People find this easy in the friendly relaxed atmosphere. The one-day programme runs from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm on Sunday 9th May. See Booking Form.

## The Magic of Plato

The day begins with a short informal introductory talk from David Horan, head of Platonic Studies in the School and in constant demand the world over to come and present similar days. He will set the scene for the day in a style which is always engaging, insightful, relevant to contemporary life, and often humorous. This will be followed by Plato's famous story of the cave on film, our main theme this year. We then break into several small



**Must do my Plato, I'm never well without that."**

**RUSKIN**

groups, before and after lunch, to read and discover Plato for ourselves, and how it applies in the modern world. The day finishes with a closing talk summarising what it all means, and taking questions. Although many will not have read nor discussed the subject before, everyone will almost certainly discover the magic of Plato themselves at first hand, and become a fan for life.

## Booking

Advance pre-paid booking required – see booking form.



# One-Day Programme

- 9.30 am** Registration, Tea & Coffee (25 mins)
- 10.00 am** **Chairman's Introduction:** Daniel O'Connor (5 mins)
- 10.05 am** **Setting the Scene:** David Horan on "Plato and the Ascent to Freedom" (25 mins)
- 10.30 am** **Theme for the Day:** The Cave Story from Plato's Republic. World premier of specially commissioned animated film (30 mins)
- 11.00 am** Morning Coffee (25 mins)
- 11.30 am** **Discovering Plato 1:** First extract from Plato, in discussion groups. How the modern world fares against the wisdom of Socrates (75 mins)
- 12.45 pm** Lunch (90 mins)
- 2.15 pm** **Discovering Plato 2:** Second extract from Plato, in discussion groups. Pitting your wits against the wisdom of Socrates (75 mins)
- 3.30 pm** Afternoon Tea (25 mins)
- 4.00 pm** **Discovering Plato 3:** "What Socrates offers the modern world", concluding talk with David Horan, including questions (60 mins)
- 5.00 pm** Wine Reception & Refreshments (30 mins)



David Horan



Daniel O'Connor



## Getting There

The Ambassador Hotel is located in the heart of Cork city on the top of Military Hill in the historic area of St. Luke's. See map for detail