

Historical Views of Leadership: Plato and Aristotle Essay

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What is leadership, and how do we attain the best and most effective leaders? These are questions that are as old as civilization itself. Bass (1974) wrote that, “from its infancy, the study of history has been the study of leaders” (as cited in Wren, 1995, p. 50). Since the study of history in the West is commonly held to begin with Herodotus of ancient Athens, it is not surprising that we should examine the historical views of [leadership](#) through the eyes of two titans of Greek thought: [Plato](#) and Aristotle.

Both men lived in 4th century BCE Athens, so much of their background and experience was shared. Aristotle was the younger of the two, and he was Plato’s student. Where leadership is concerned, both philosophers agreed that the “best men” should rule, and that the purpose of leadership was the betterment of the State. They also agreed that education was paramount to forming these best men. They disagreed, however, on whether or not leaders were born with inherent qualities, or if these qualities depend solely on education. They also disagreed about whether or not a strict separation between leaders and followers is required, and what form of [government](#) the best State should take.

Plato was the student of another great Athenian thinker, Socrates, and he used him as a mouthpiece throughout his dialogues to examine philosophical concepts (Wren, 1995). One of the most important concepts that Plato defines is justice, and it is in this analysis where we find most of his thoughts on leadership.

For Plato, like many Greeks of his day, the individual was subordinate to the state. Political participation was paramount, so when he discusses leadership, he is talking about leadership of the State. Because society is more im...

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... Aristotle on the other hand was the teacher of Alexander the Great, a man who many people think the best leader of the time.

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