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## Study Guide on Plato's *Seventh Letter*

### QUESTIONS ON THE WHOLE WORK

1. What kind of person is Dion, Plato's addressee? What is Plato up to by writing this account of his three visits to Dionysios? What is he trying to educate Dion in?
2. Plato has different relationships with Dion and Dionysios, both of whom are rulers. Plato taught both of them, but Dion turns out to be a true friend and Dionysios an enemy. What was the difference between Dion and Dionysios' approach to studying philosophy?
3. Although Plato digresses on the deficiencies of the written word, he writes a letter. What is the problem with the written word?
4. How do you come to learn something? What is the process of learning?
5. How do you test if someone is virtuous or vicious?
6. What are the qualities of the best ruler?

### QUESTIONS ON THE OUTLINED PARTS

1. Greeting to Dion
  - 324a-b **Issue:** Should the Syracusans be free and governed by the best laws?
  - 324b **Purpose:** "to give you an account of [this issue] from the beginning"
2. Fall of Athens
  - 324c-d **Plato's ambition;** Athenian revolution & replace bad government with a worse one
  - 325a-c Trial of Socrates, "the most upright man of the day," on charge of impiety.
  - 325c-26b Plato's desire for good friends, just laws, and **true philosophy**, which enables men "to see what justice in public and private life really is." *What are the two ways to diminish evil in a state?*
3. First visit and advice to Dionysios
  - 326b-d **Travel to Sicily:** *What virtues does Plato see as necessary for wisdom?*
  - 326e-d **Travel to Syracuse:** *What does Plato teach Dion and what does Dion conclude from this teaching?*
  - 326d-29b **Travel to Athens:** *How does Dion persuade Plato to return to Syracuse? What motivates Plato to return?*
4. Second visit and advice to Dionysios
  - 329b-30b **Travel to Sicily:** *What kind of leader is Dionysios? How does he lead?*
  - 330d-31a **Analogy** of physician's prognosis to philosopher's counsel: *Why does virtue take a change of life?*
  - 331a-d Advice on giving advice only when asked: *What is the role of freedom in pursuing virtue?*
  - 331d-32d Advice on using persuasion over force: *What is the surest criterion of virtue?*
  - 332d-33b Advice on pursuing virtue: *What does advice need to translate into?*
  - 333b-34d **Advice on goodwill in a warring nation:** *In what does the wise man put his trust?*
  - 334d-35b Advice on the immortality of the soul: *What eternal effects do temporal actions have?*



- 335c-36b The murder of Dion and the fall of Dionysios: *What led to Dionysios' downfall?*
- 336c-37e Takeaways on love of country, laws, rulers: *How do you end civil strife and disorder?*
- 5. Return to Athens
  - 337e-38c First invitation to Dionysios' court: *Why does Plato refuse to go to Dionysios' court?*
  - 338c-39a Second invitation to Dionysios' court: *Why does Plato refuse this time?*
  - 339a-40a **Third invitation to Dionysios' court:** *Why does Plato accept the invitation this time?*
- 6. Third visit and advice to Dionysios
  - 340b-341a **Dionysios' temperament vs. the true philosopher's:** *What is the surest test of temperament?*
    - Digression on Learning
      - 341b-e Plato writes to illuminate the nature of things
      - 342a-43c **The process of learning: name, definition, image, knowledge, thing**
      - 343c-e The need for nature and nature:
      - 344a-d **The need for moral and intellectual virtue**
      - 344d-45a The deficiencies of the written word
  - 345a-47e Dionysios' lack of learning, Plato's attempt to leave, Dionysios' proposal, Plato's response
  - 348a-50b Dionysios' injustices toward Plato: *What philosophical point does Plato want to make in this story?*
  - 350b-52e Plato's friendship with Dion: *What philosophical point does Plato want to make in this story?*
- 7. Conclusion (352a)

***Suggested use:*** This study guide includes a few questions and observations about Plato's *Seventh Letter*. Among possible uses, one could consider these comments while reading the work; or one could use them as starting points for a classroom discussion.