Rediscovering Plato and
the Mystical Science of Dialectic

By

Norman D. Livergood
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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wife, Michelle Mairesse. Her assistance in writing and editing has been invaluable.

Our life together consists in ongoing Dialectical Interchange in all dimensions, as explicated in this book. The process of Dialectical Writing, explored in chapter fourteen, has been the operational procedure used in creating this work. In a very real sense, this book is a co-creation.
Introduction

"The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."


The Greek thinker Plato (428-348 BCE) speaks trenchantly to us today about twenty-first century barbarism. No other single thinker offers us the weapons to defeat contemporary oppression and ignorance.

Many enlightening and transformative concepts and institutions originating in Plato’s writings pervade Western culture. It’s impossible to determine just how debased human life would now be had these teachings not been available to enlightened thinkers.

Not only can Plato teach us how to withstand a constant barrage of propagandized power-plays, but Plato also provides esoteric Perennialist instructions for realizing our spiritual potential, which is even more important than struggling against despotism and benightedness. Plato helps us to rescue ourselves not only from political-economic-religious tyrants, but also from our own tyrannies: our mindless self-indulgence, our acquiescence to ignorance and self-satisfaction.

In this book we experience the truth of Thomas Taylor’s grand assertion concerning Plato’s thought, that "All other philosophies . . . are but rivulets derived from this vast ocean of truth."

Academic scholastic pseudo-philosophers have, both deliberately and inadvertently, misinterpreted Plato’s philosophy, attempting to twist it into a “system” in which they are “experts.” Most of their interpretations have created a morass of turgid, jargon-ridden gibberish. This book’s explication of Plato’s authentic thought and practice in uncomplicated, straightforward terms makes his philosophy once again accessible to the modern reader.

Political, economic, and religious tyrannies have overwhelmed humankind throughout most of our history, especially in the ruinous centuries we call the Dark Ages, and now again in the twenty-first century as a demonic cabal has seized power and imposed a fascistic dictatorship on the United States. It is only when teachings like Plato’s
dialogues become current again in the West that we will be able to rise above barbarity and depravity to a more enlightened existence.

The underlying bases of our contemporary social structures are founded on Plato’s concept of a natural, divine law that humans must follow to achieve justice and right conduct. In this work, we’ll examine Plato’s ideas about the human powers of reason, self-awareness, and language that shaped Western civilization. Careful study and application of the same concepts today can help us sharpen our minds and recover our traditions, since we have allowed both to deteriorate. We’ll see how the despotic forces presently obliterating life and humane institutions worldwide begin by undermining Plato’s ideas.

We’ll focus attention on Plato’s mystical science of Dialectic to show how we can attain higher knowledge in the Supersensual Intelligible realm, beyond the illusions and opinions of the ordinary sense world.

The reader may be encouraged and inspired to learn that the process Plato called philosophia—the love of and search for wisdom—can in fact overcome modern tyranny, lies, and ignorance. We’ll see how later Platonists, such as Boethius, used this practical procedure to overcome oppression and despair.

Plato’s philosophy preserves and contributes to human evolution major conceptions of truth, goodness, and beauty. When a society such as the United States undergoes a period of imperialistic dictatorship, as it is now doing, we must reinvigorate the original principles on which the nation was founded and rediscover our heritage.

This book offers a synopsis of the elemental foundation-structures of the human heritage as first presented by Plato. Further, it includes keys to Plato’s mystical philosophy of Dialectic, which the discerning reader can use to develop Higher Awareness.

1  The Perennial Tradition is the hidden secret teaching which has been transmitted through all the world's major mystical and esoteric systems. In the Perennial Tradition we thus have teachers such as the author of the Bhavagad Gita, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Confucius, Plato, Jesus, Boethius, Rumi, and Francis of Assisi. This teaching is adapted to the specific needs of the time and the people during each historic era. In each age a teacher is active in the world to reinterpret the Perennialist teachings to people of that era. Thus the Perennial Tradition has been given varied names such as: Philosophia, Gnosticism, Alchemy, and Sufism, among others. For a complete explication of the Perennial Tradition, see the author’s recent book The Perennial Tradition, published by Dandelion Press.

2  The demonic cabal is an international gang of capitalist criminals which includes the Rockefeller, Bush, and Harriman factions in the U.S., the British royals, the Rotschilds, and the Saudi billionaire families.
Chapter One: Plato's Contemporary Importance

As a Perennialist master, Plato made certain knowledge available which has been instrumental in the development and improvement of Western civilization. It is this knowledge that is so important in reconstituting our society at present.

The essence of what we know as Western civilization derives from Plato and the other teachers within the Perennial Tradition. It's easy enough to understand that technological objects—such as a computer—and social structures—such as democracy—are human inventions: at one time these things did not exist, and some person, or group of persons, conceived of and developed them.

It's difficult for us to realize that the powers of mind that we call "rational intelligence" were actually invented by Plato and the thinkers who followed in his path. When it comes to critical thinking, it’s hard to understand that at one time this capability of the human mind did not exist and had to be deliberately constructed.

It's also a challenge to understand that humankind's ability to think critically is a proficiency that can be lost. That is, reason and intelligence can become unavailable to a particular culture if the ability to think critically is totally denigrated, all interest in it destroyed, or it is deliberately abandoned.

"Out of Plato come all things that are still written and debated among men of thought."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

In Western culture we define intelligence as:

- The ability to learn or understand or to deal with new or trying situations
- The ability to apply knowledge to manipulate one's environment or to think abstractly as measured by objective criteria
- Understanding and comprehension

How Greece Transmitted Its Culture

In each society, the public meanings, ideas, and skills are transmitted through cultural institutions (theaters, schools, academies, churches, universities, news sources) and through the media (newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, Internet).
A culture is formed around a distinct ethos: a collection of public and private mores expressive of its coherence as a social unit. This ethos or tradition requires embodiment in formulations which both delineate and enforce the normative behavior patterns.

By adhering to and preserving these formulations the culture develops a **common consciousness** and a distinctive set of values. The ethos is embodied in verbal expressions such as constitutions, laws, literature, art, and drama. The normative archetypes of the ethos become the content of education, entertainment, and human behavior.

Prior to Plato (427-347 BCE) Greece had transmitted its cultural ethos through the **oral tradition** of the major Greek poets from Homer to Euripides. In such a **preliterate society** the ethos was preserved and transmitted in the **memories** of successive generations.

A preliterate culture's survival depends on its collective social memory, which must be passed down in a linguistic form which can be **memorized** and constantly re-presented. The verbal configuration that guarantees the preservation of a preliterate culture is rhythmic statements in metrical patterns unique enough to retain their shape as they pass from mind to mind; in other words, Greek **lyric and epic poetry, music, and drama**!

This is the phenomenon the Greeks called **mimesis** defined as "art’s imitation of life: the imitation of life or nature in the techniques and subject matter of art and literature." Contemporary scholars sometimes misidentify mimesis with "poetry," "music," or "drama" in our current meaning of those terms.

Once we recognize the comprehensive reach of the Greek term **mimesis**, which encapsulates all verbal and behavioral formulations of the ethos, we can understand that Plato was referring to something much different--and more inclusive--than our term "poetry."

"All human civilisations rely on a sort of cultural 'book', that is, on the capacity to put information in storage in order to reuse it. Before Homer's day, the Greek cultural 'book' had been stored in oral memory. . . . Between Homer and Plato, the method of storage began to alter, as the information became alphabetized, and correspondingly the eye supplanted the ear as the chief organ employed for this purpose."

Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*

When we read *The Commonwealth*, Plato's discussion of the ideal of justice, it's possible to be shocked by his insistence that "poets" and "poetry" are not to be admitted, unless we realize that Plato was referring to "poets" and "poetry" not in our sense but in his sense of the "oral state of mind."
"Once it is accepted that the oral situation had persisted through the fifth century, one faces the conclusion that there would also persist what one may call an oral state of mind as well; a mode of consciousness so to speak, and . . . a vocabulary and syntax, which were not that of a literate bookish culture. And once one admits this and admits that the oral state of mind would show a time lag so that it persisted into a new epoch when the technology of communication had changed, it becomes understandable that the oral state of mind is still for Plato the main enemy.

"Plato characterized the oral state of mind as 'a crippling of the mind.' It is a kind of disease, for which one has to acquire an antidote. The antidote must consist of a knowledge 'of what things really are'. In short, poetry is a species of mental poison, and is the enemy of truth. This is surely a shocker to the sensibilities of any modern reader and his incredulity is not lessened by the peroration with which, a good many pages later, Plato winds up his argument: 'Crucial indeed is the struggle, more crucial that we think--the choice that makes us good or bad--to keep faithful to righteousness and virtue in the face of temptation, be it of fame or money or power, or of poetry--yes, even of poetry.' If he thus exhorts us to fight the good fight against poetry, like a Greek Saint Paul warring against the powers of darkness, we can conclude either that he has lost all sense of proportion or that his target cannot be poetry in our sense, but something more fundamental in the Greek experience, and most powerful."

Eric A. Havelock, Preface to Plato

Given that a preliterate culture's ethos must be preserved and transmitted to and by each generation, how did an individual Greek citizen memorize the dramatic formulations--Homer and the other Greek "poets" and dramatists--so as to retain in his memory the verbal tradition on which his culture depended?

He imbibed Greek poetry and drama which was constantly performed in the theaters, recited by his family and friends, portrayed in paintings and murals, represented in pottery, and referred to in his school lessons. He then repeated it and added to his repertoire to the limits of his mental capacity.

The primary psychological factors that helped the Greek layman to retain at least a minimal grasp of the cultural ethos were a state of total personal involvement and the resultant emotional identification with the essence of the poetized drama that he was required to keep in memory.

He identified with the words and actions of the poetic drama as an actor does with his lines. He "became" Achilles, he identified with his grief and his anger. Years later he could still automatically recite what Achilles said and recall what heroic acts he performed.
As Plato points out, such enormous feats of memorization resulted in the total loss of objectivity. You did not think about the drama; you merely memorized it. Plato recognized that this was a cultural indoctrination procedure, an entire way of life inimical to reflection and reason.

"We must realise that works of genius, composed within the semi-oral tradition, though a source of magnificent pleasure to the modern reader of ancient Greek, constituted or represented a total state of mind which is not our mind and which was not Plato's mind; and that just as poetry itself, as long as it reigned supreme, constituted the chief obstacle to the achievement of effective prose, so there was a state of mind which we shall conveniently label the 'poetic' or 'Homeric' or 'oral' state of mind which constituted the chief obstacle to scientific rationalism, to the use of analysis, to the classification of experience, to its rearrangement in sequence of cause and effect.

“That is why the poetic state of mind is for Plato the arch-enemy and it is easy to see why he considered this enemy so formidable. He is entering the lists against centuries of habituation in rhythmic memorised experience. He asks of men that instead they should examine this experience and rearrange it, that they should think about what they say, instead of just saying it. And they should separate themselves from it instead of identifying with it; they themselves should become the 'subject' who stands apart from the 'object' and reconsiders it and analyses it and evaluates it, instead of just 'imitating' it."

Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*

The Athenian ruler Pisastratus gave state support for stage plays. Many of these dramatic performances "spoke" in a dialect closer to the vernacular. These became a kind of supplement to Homer as a way to preserve the cultural memory. The plays were memorised, taught, quoted and recited in everyday conversation. Each dramatic performance was a lesson in the wit and wisdom of the Hellenic culture.

"Control over the style of a people's speech, however indirect, means control also over their thought. The two technologies of preserved communication known to man, namely the poetised style with its acoustic apparatus and the visual prosaic style with its visual and material apparatus, each within their respective domains control also the content of what is communicable. Under one set of conditions man arranges his experience in words in some one given way; under the second set of conditions he arranges the same experience differently in different words and with different syntax and perhaps as he does so the experience itself changes. This amounts to saying that the patterns of his thought have historically run in two distinct grooves, the oral and the written . . . Plato . . . seems to have been convinced that poetry and the poet had exercised a control not merely over
Greek verbal idiom but over the Greek state of mind and consciousness. The control in his view had been central and he describes it as though it were monopolistic."

Eric A. Havelock, Preface to Plato

Plato's momentous contribution to the evolution of the human mind was in replacing the "oral state of mind"--memorization through association--with his conception of the process of reasoned reflection.

"The Greek tongue therefore, as long as it is the speech of men who have remained in the Greek sense 'musical' and have surrendered themselves to the spell of the tradition, cannot frame words to express the conviction that 'I' am one thing and the tradition is another; that 'I' can stand apart from the tradition and examine it; that 'I' can and should break the spell of its hypnotic force; and that 'I' should divert some at least of my mental powers away from memorisation and direct them instead into channels of critical inquiry and analysis. The Greek ego in order to achieve that kind of cultural experience which after Plato became possible and then normal must stop identifying itself successively with a whole series of polymorphic vivid narrative situations; must stop re-enacting the whole scale of the emotions, of challenge, and of love, and hate and fear and despair and joy, in which the characters of epic become involved. It must stop splitting itself up into an endless series of moods. It must separate itself out and by an effort of sheer will must rally itself to the point where it can say 'I am I, an autonomous little universe of my own, able to speak, think and act in independence of what I happen to remember'. This amounts to accepting the premise that there is a 'me', a 'self', a 'soul', a consciousness which is self-governing and which discovers the reason for action in itself rather than in imitation of the poetic experience. The doctrine of the autonomous psyche is the counterpart of the rejection of the oral culture."

Eric A. Havelock, Preface to Plato

Aldous Huxley’s Perennial Philosophy reminds us that "certain thoughts are practically unthinkable except in terms of an appropriate language and within the framework of an appropriate system of classification. Where these necessary instruments do not exist, the thoughts in question are not expressed and not even conceived. Nor is this all: the incentive to develop the instruments of certain kinds of thinking is not always present."

Plato contributed significantly to humankind's development by creating or expanding:
• The activity of sheer thinking
• Words and concepts having to do with critical, autonomous thinking
• The conception of a personality that thinks and knows
• The notion of an independent, invisible, timeless body of knowledge which is thought about and known—the Forms

How Human Intelligence Can Be Lost

Our study of Plato's struggle to replace the "oral state of mind" with a rational mind-set is particularly timely because the twenty-first century is experiencing precisely the opposite trend: the deliberate destruction of the rational mind-set and devolution to the "oral state of mind."

In the new "oral tradition" that has overwhelmed our culture, we have a new Homer. Homer Simpson serves as a clear representation of the current "imitative," anti-intellectual, "whatever-feels-good," anti-mind, "truth-is-relative" barbarism.

Plato saw the oral, non-literate state of consciousness as a crippling or poisoning of the mind, the creation of a false "reality" which individuals are made to believe in. In our current TV-movie-music-news propaganda culture, a total counterfeit "reality" is created, people do not see what is really going on--only what the media tells them is happening.

This is why Homer Simpson is a revealing icon for the contemporary retrogression to a state of "exuberant ignorance." Homer is not only a TV character--one step from reality, he is also a cartoon character--another step removed. The fact that people watch this cartoon character means that they have become entranced by a shadow on Plato's cave, a phantom specter. They are losing any taste for reality.

"When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk: culture-death is a clear possibility."

Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death

Plato clearly recognized that man's evolutionary advancement requires that he come out of the primitive mind-set and gain the capabilities of rational thought and self-consciousness. Plato had experienced first hand how anti-intellectual drama can cause terrible havoc. In 419 B.C.E, Aristophanes had written a treacherous play entitled "The Clouds" featuring a character by the name of Socrates who was a sophist, who did not believe in Zeus or the Olympian gods, who introduced new gods, and who corrupted young people by teaching them tricks of rhetoric and setting them against their elders. This ridiculous, deliberately false image of "Socrates," created merely for the amusement of the theater audience, became part of the basis for the Athenian prosecutors' indictment of the
real Socrates, resulting in Socrates’ execution by the state.

At the start of his self-defense in the *Apology*, Plato’s Socrates complains that his reputation has been smeared, and that the charges against him really came from Aristophanes’ murderous caricature of him:

"I have had many accusers, who accused me of old, and their false charges have continued during many years; and I am more afraid of them than of Anytus and his associates, who are dangerous, too, in their own way. But far more dangerous are these, who began when you were children, and took possession of your minds with their falsehoods, telling of one Socrates, a wise man, who speculated about the heaven above, and searched into the earth beneath, and made the worse appear the better cause. These are the accusers whom I dread; for they are the circulators of this rumor, and their hearers are too apt to fancy that speculators of this sort do not believe in the gods. And they are many, and their charges against me are of ancient date, and they made them in days when you were impressionable in childhood, or perhaps in youth, and the cause when heard went by default, for there was none to answer. And, hardest of all, their names I do not know and cannot tell, except in the case of a comic poet."

Plato had seen first hand the power of destructive burlesque to form prejudices based entirely on lies and falsehoods. Little wonder that Plato feared the corrupting influence of art (poetry, literature, drama, painting) on society!

**Society’s Ruling Ideas Are the Ideas of the Ruling Class**

In most cultures, the "ruling ideas" have fostered violence and class warfare. In only a few instances in history, have the "ruling ideas" fostered the betterment of common people and society at large. One example of such a benevolent era was the eighteenth century Enlightenment, which encouraged humans to develop broad understanding in all fields of knowledge. Highly educated, intelligent groups in Europe and America developed toward a commonwealth way of life, created constitutions, and founded institutions for public education.

During this Enlightenment period, words and phrases such as "liberty," "freedom," "natural rights," "pursuit of happiness," "consent of the governed," "informed citizenry," came into being for the first time or were first understood by humans through their own experience.

America has served as the beacon of these Enlightenment ideals, maintaining its faith in "the power of knowledge and reason in self-determination."
"There can be no real question that the Enlightenment promoted the cause of freedom, more widely, directly, positively than any age before it. It not only asserted but demonstrated the power of knowledge and reason in self-determination, the choice and realization of human purpose.

"For the first time in history it carried out a concerted attack on the vested interests that opposed the diffusion of knowledge and the free exercise of reason.

"As thinkers the men of the Enlightenment were conscious revolutionaries, very much aware of a 'new method of philosophizing' that amounted to a new living faith, the basis for a new social order."

Herbert J. Muller. (1964). *Freedom in the Western World*

Culture as a creation of humankind is a neutral element—it can be used for positive or negative ends. Through the process of acculturation—the process beginning at infancy by which human beings acquire the culture of their society—individuals are stamped with social norms.

Vested, moneyed interests have constantly sought to demolish the American traditions of democracy, plotting to destroy the enlightening "diffusion of knowledge and the free exercise of reason." Their method of rule is not by "consent of the governed" or rational discourse, but by arbitrary dictate of a tyrant's fascistic tactics.

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As our contemporary American culture devolves to the Homer Simpson and George W. Bush "oral frame of mind," people are beginning to lose the very capabilities which have distinguished them from the lower animals: language, intelligence, and critical awareness.
"On every societal front, nonsense is replacing good sense in our once-pragmatic nation. It is accompanied by a distortion of thought that weakens our ability to distinguish truth from falsity, the basic skill of a civilized society."


Humans today are rapidly losing the intellectual ability to realize or be concerned that their very lives are threatened by the loss of the ability to use language to understand and communicate. As Thomas Jefferson made clear, "no people can be both ignorant and free."

Among a large number of studies of the contemporary "oral" MTV culture of illiteracy, violence, and anti-intellectualism, two books stand out in exposing the ruinous nature of this barbarity:

- Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*: "In saying that the television news show entertains but does not inform, I am saying something far more serious than that we are being deprived of authentic information. I am saying we are losing our sense of what it means to be well informed. Ignorance is always correctable. But what shall we do if we take ignorance to be knowledge?"

- Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*: "Students have not the slightest notion of what an achievement it is to free oneself from public guidance and find resources for guidance within oneself. From what source within themselves would they draw the goals they think they set for themselves? Liberation from the heroic only means that they have no resource whatsoever against conformity to the current 'role models.' . . . They unconsciously act out the roles of the doctors, lawyers, businessmen or TV personalities around them."

The invention of language enabled a species of ape to evolve into humans. Language, like any technology, can be used for creative or destructive ends:

- Enabling humans to develop enhanced consciousness and continue human evolution
- Enabling a debased cabal of obscenely wealthy people to manipulate and control others, leading to a degenerate species obsessed by egomania and greed

"So essential is language to man's humanness, so deep a source is it of his own creativity, that it is by no means an accident in our time that those who have tried to degrade man and enslave him have first debased and misused language, arbitrarily turning meanings inside out."

Lewis Mumford. *The Conduct of Life*
We are allowing our institutions of "learning" to deteriorate to the point that ordinary citizens are progressively losing the ability to use language effectively. We allow communication media to condition us with their truncated lexicon of meanings so that we lose even the awareness of essential concepts such as "commonwealth" or "inspiration."

An increasing number of people have no understanding of or competency in language, communication, and intelligent reasoning:

- Increasing numbers of high schools and college students are effectively illiterate.
- Multiculturalism is creating a Tower of Babel. For example, twelve different languages are being taught in Los Angeles schools.

"In confronting an environment, the superiority of the individual, of the population, of the race at our stage of human history must rest in large portion on the capacity to learn."

Robert Ardrey. *The Social Contract*

In each era of human history, adepts in the Perennial Tradition have made exoteric knowledge available to the people in general. This knowledge has served as the basis for periodic social advancement, as in Pythagoras' cultural center at Croton, Plato's Academy in fourth century Athens, and the eighteenth century Enlightenment in Europe and America. To specific students, they have taught the esoteric knowledge of spiritual regeneration.

Perennialists books and teachings contain, in an "invisible" manner, knowledge of the secret processes by which the regeneration of individuals and humanity in general is to be accomplished. These works usually contain both exoteric and esoteric strains and also serve as the key to other Perennialist writings.

We must regain the understanding, taught by Perennialist sages throughout the ages, that there is a magic in language which contributes to human evolution. Language in some way creates the very reality in which we live. Words and concepts point to realities beyond the sensory world and help us to make contact with a higher dimension.

Intangible Ideas, in Plato's conception—supersensible realities beyond human thought—are appropriated through words, as birds in our hands, and released by the act of discernment, setting the birds free. These Ideas reside in the words independent of the books or the sounds in which the words are encased. Through a knowledgeable study of Plato's timeless ideas, we can achieve cultural re-enlightenment and personal illumination.
Chapter Two: Plato As a Perennialist Teacher

We can only understand Plato if we recognize him as a Perennialist teacher, not a conventional teacher in the ancient tradition of the sophists or the contemporary academic tradition of “philosophy.” The diverse embodiments of the Perennial Tradition include:

- The Hermetic Philosophy
- Hinduism, Taoism, and Buddhism
- The Jewish Wisdom Tradition
- The Pythagorean System
- Plato’s Philosophy
- Esoteric Christianity
- Neo-Platonism
- Sufism
- Gothic Cathedral Philosophy
- The Cambridge Platonists
- Eighteenth Century Enlightenment Philosophers
- Twenty-first century Perennialist teachings and writings

Comprehending the extraordinary characteristics of a Perennialist master is a difficult task, since these attributes are very much out of vogue in the world today.

Perennialist teaching material and teaching methods are the outcome of creative adaptation by the initiated teacher of the identical stream of Perennialist truth to contemporary needs.

Perennialist teachings point to a new way of discerning the world, different from ordinary intellect or reason, requiring training in this way of Higher Cognition, what Plato called Dialectic. Because scholastics and sensation seekers adopt a totally different viewpoint and methodology, they cannot possibly comprehend a Perennialist teacher such as Plato, Jesus, or Shahabudin Suhrawardi. Most scholarly books written about Perennialist teachers assume that they can be understood only through scholastic methods:

- Analyzing specific doctrines in their teachings
- Collating doctrines shared with other teachers to determine intellectual lineage
- Creating vast systems of “interconnections”
- Ignoring the teachers’ practices as irrelevant
- Omitting the organic element, i.e., that teachings are nutrients meant to be metabolized, not to remain in their original, unaltered state

Perennialist teachers always work within the esoteric or “secret” component of any religion or philosophy, because teachings concerning the development of higher states of
consciousness can only be made available to select seekers who have completed initial training exercises.

The Perennialist teaching maintains—in all its embodiments—that the seeker must stop imagining that he understands and begin to understand in an authentic way. The process is first to recognize that one is ignorant of his own ignorance: believing he knows things which he does not actually know.

What we must comprehend, if we are to understand Plato (as one among other Perennialist teachers), is that his view of philosophy—the love of and search for wisdom—is totally different from the scholastic view. Wisdom for Plato was not just highly-compressed human erudition or potted profundity, as it is currently viewed. Wisdom was the soul’s experience of

“returning into herself and reflecting, passing into the realm of purity, and eternity, and immortality, and unchangeableness, which are her kindred, and with them she ever lives, when she is by herself and is not let or hindered; then she ceases from her erring ways, and being in communion with the unchanging is unchanging. And this state of the soul is called wisdom.”

Plato, *Phaedo*, 79d

The difficulty is that since the time of Aristotle, what has been called philosophy is but the distant echo of what it was to Plato. Beginning with Aristotle, “philosophy” became nothing more than the intellectual analysis and synthesis of concepts into systems of thought which other later “philosophers” could then analyze and critique, building their own superstructures of conjecture.

Having recently read scores of books and Web sites in my research for this book, I became convinced that of the making of unenlightened, unenlightening material about Plato’s “philosophy” there appears to be no end. Each scholastic “Plato expert” (self-appointed) attempts to stretch Plato’s body of works on a procrustean bed and mangle the corpse until it fits the author’s preconceptions and prejudices.

The French essayist Michel de Montaigne observed that many sorts of “learned authors” utilize authoritative texts such as Plato’s dialogues as little more than rhetorical ballast for their own views.

“See how Plato is tossed and turned about. All are honored to have his support, so they couch him on their own side. They trot him out and slip him into any new opinion which fashion will accept. When matters take a different turn, then they make him disagree with himself.”


Since the death of Plato, scholars have tried to interpret and explain Plato’s “philosophical system.” Beginning with Aristotle, scholastic philosophers have seen philosophy as nothing more than the dissolution and rebuilding of concepts by the
rational understanding. Thus we have a sub-library brimming over with unreadable tomes “explaining” Plato’s “philosophy” in terms completely alien to Plato. Anyone who makes an honest effort to read Plato on his own terms recognizes at once that this is a different kettle of fish—this is not what you get in Philosophy 101 at the state university today.

Not only are Plato’s words and ideas those of a mystic, not a scholar, the very way he writes identifies him as a dramatic artist painting word pictures, not an academic pedagogue. The very structure which he uses for most of his writing—the dialogue form—makes it clear that Plato is not interested in creating a scholarly “system” which can then be used as the corpus for scholarly study by “learned” pedants.

"One can only be thankful that for once in the history of the world Lady Philosophy learned to speak with utter charm the language of true poetry, and that Plato preferred the dramatic essay, with its personal touch, to dry-as-dust system-building."

William Chase Greene, "Introduction," *The Dialogues of Plato*, 1927

As with all Perennialist teachers, Plato’s purpose is to assist his students achieve a higher kind of knowledge: the direct perception of forms or ideas by the “eye of the soul.” Plato will thus do or write whatever assists in achieving that goal.

If scholars paid more attention to Plato’s own ideas expressed in his writings—instead of to their fantasy-castles of ethereal supposition—they would see that he is saying that some Perennialist teaching must be communicated in uncommon forms such as myth, that esoteric training in Dialectic must involve the teacher and students engaging in spoken interchange. (Plato, *Protagoras*, 347c-348a, *Phaedrus*, 274b-278e, *Epistle VII.*, 341b-345a)

Once recognizing that Plato was a Perennialist teacher, we then stop expecting to find in his writings the usual system-building, logistical argumentation, or theoretical superstructure. In Plato’s writings, we look in upon him as he is conducting his teaching sessions via the written word. He does everything he can—the dialogue format, the continual admission by Socrates that he doesn’t know something, the satirization of sterile scholastic argufying—to put the reader in a non-scholastic frame of mind.

What we find in reading scholars’ learned studies of Plato’s philosophy—or artists’ visual depictions of him—are the results of a philosophical Rorschach test. Plato is a fathomless depth into which a pedant can put his own misconceptions and rationalizations. These scholarly studies, then, tell us only about the scholar, not about Plato.

A good example of this self-exposure is Immanuel Kant’s pathetic attempt to vilify Plato as a metaphysical charlatan. Kant claimed that Plato attempted to prove the
existence of a priori notions that make synthetic statements possible through reference to perceptions that have their sources not in human understanding but in the primordial ground (Urgrund) of all things. Kant accused Plato of creating these “perceptions” out of thin air, mere subjective feeling.

Plato’s effort, Kant asserts, involved a “mystical illumination,” which brands him as having fallen into Schwarmerei (the enthusiasm of visionary charlatans) that is “the death of all philosophy.” Thus for Kant, Plato was the charlatan par excellence—nothing more.

Anyone who has found it required, for whatever reason (taking a graduate course at Yale in my case), to plod through the unreadable volumes of Kant’s turgid theories, comes away with the clear and distinct perception that the perversion of genuine philosophy has been the work of scholastics such as Kant.

At least one contemporary interpreter of Plato sees him as a mystic of the jnani type.

“Evidence in favour of viewing the Socratic questioning as similar to the koan is this: they often leave the recipient stultified or confused. In the Meno the analogy with a stingray is used to describe this numbing or perplexing effect, [40] though with typical Socratic involution he accepts the analogy only if he is also numbed (rendered ignorant). In the Symposium Alcibiades tells us that the conversation of Socrates is ‘utterly ridiculous’ to the uninitiated.”

Mike King, “Was Socrates a Mystic?”

Recognizing Plato as a teaching master in the mystical Perennial Tradition, we see that the past and present efforts of scholars to discover and expose faults and inconsistencies in Plato's supposed philosophical arguments are misdirected—based on ignorance of who Plato really was.

If we liken Plato's writings to other expressions of the mystical tradition, we might say that they are a kind of verbal Mystery initiation. In such countries as Egypt and Greece, the Mysteries were dramatic performances in which esoteric knowledge about human rebirth was personified by the priests and neophytes, who enacted the parts of various gods and goddesses, performing allegorical scenes from their lives. These initiatory rites explained the hidden meanings of the self and the soul to the candidates for initiation and facilitated psychological and psychic experiences of higher states of consciousness.

"Like the adherents of the various mystical sects, Orphic and Eleusinian and Dionysian, Plato longed to be free from the trammels of the senses and almost as in the act of dying to find union with the eternal goodness in the universe. Thus the ideas may become the object of immediate mystical intuition; and Plato's thought is often permeated with the very language of the mysteries, imaginative or even ecstatic."

William Chase Greene, "Introduction," The Dialogues of Plato, 1927
Understanding that Plato was a Perennialist teacher, thus viewing his writings as the works of a mystic savant assisting students to achieve a higher state of consciousness, the best way to approach Plato's works are as contemplation pieces which one can use in meditation exercises.
Chapter Three: Plato’s Conception and Development of Philosophy

In earliest times certain sages discovered the fundamental nature of ultimate reality. Their successors have taught select students how to reawaken organs of perception, resulting in a higher state of consciousness. This higher consciousness enables the student to discern that what we take to be reality is actually a kind of illusion and that there are higher dimensions of being. This state of higher discernment has been called wisdom and the teaching of the attainment of this state, the quest for wisdom.

The early Greek, Arabic, and Persian mystics called this tradition philosophia, the love of and the search for wisdom. From the earliest records of persons who practiced philosophia, it is clear that for these individuals philosophy was a way of life, not merely an intellectual pursuit. Some of them—Pythagoras, Socrates, Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi, and Jesus, among others—paid for their pursuit of wisdom with their very lives.

“Suhrawardi’s life and Suhrawardi's thought were intimately connected, just as they were for Pythagoras and many later philosophers who believed that philosophy required a philosophical life. Philosophy for him was the love of wisdom and implied the obligation to live his philosophy; it was not simply the love of talking about wisdom. To pursue the Illuminationist philosophy, it is necessary to seek enlightenment from the divine lights.”

John Walbridge. The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks

The Perennialist teaching is the hidden secret which has been transmitted through all the world's major mystical and esoteric systems. In the Perennial Tradition we thus have teachers such as the author of the Bhavagad Gita, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Confucius, Plato, Jesus, Rumi, and Francis of Assisi. This teaching is adapted to the specific needs of the time and the people during each historic era. After the death of the original teacher, unenlightened disciples codify the teachings, which become largely fossilized and useless. But certain other followers of the teacher, who understand the genuine teachings and processes, continue in the Perennialist line.

In each age a teacher is active in the world to reinterpret the Perennialist teachings to people of that era. Thus the Perennial Tradition has been given varied names such as: Gnosticism, Illuminism, Philosophia, and Sufism, among others.

"Do not imagine that philosophy has existed only in these recent times. The world has never been without philosophy or without a person possessing proofs and clear evidences to champion it. He is God's viceregent on His earth."

Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (1154-1191), The Wisdom of Illuminism
The Greek word *philosophia* is translated into English as "philosophy." Contemporary philosophy—and other academic disciplines—are only fossilized remains of the genuine tradition called *philosophia—the love of and the search for wisdom*. We have almost entirely lost the ability to distinguish an authentic teaching from a petrified scholastic husk. With our present state of "learning," we are largely the product of ossified systems which teach us to pile opinion on top of assumption.

We've been trained to try to blow back to life the mere imagination of long-dead coals called Classical Philosophy or Classical Science until these areas of study have become mere "disciplines" within a university curriculum, the dead seeking to resurrect the dead.

"The modern philosopher is a professional pedant, paid to instruct the young in philosophical doctrines and to write books and articles. He is a professor of philosophy, not so very different from a professor of biology or of marketing. He need not reshape his inner being to the model of the doctrines he discusses in his classes. If pressed, he will perhaps claim that he is useful because he teaches the young to think more clearly and, less plausibly, that he forces his fellow professors in other departments to clarify their concepts. The proud cities of metaphysics were long ago abandoned as indefensible and have fallen into ruin. The philosophers have for the most part retreated to the safer territory of language and logic, creating for themselves a sort of analytical Formosa."

John Walbridge. *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks*

**Plato's Conception of Initiatory Philosophia**

To distinguish the modern counterfeit which is called "philosophy" from the genuine tradition of *philosophia*, we must study carefully the writings of Plato. Though the tradition of the search for wisdom is to be found in pre-Greek cultures such as Egypt and India, the tradition of *philosophia* was actually formulated by Plato.

"Greek philosophy is autochthonous, and requires no Oriental antecedents. Greek philosophers themselves never say that they borrowed their doctrines from the East. That Pythagoras went to Egypt may be true, that he became acquainted there with the solutions of certain geometrical problems may be true also, but that he borrowed the whole of his philosophy from Egypt, is simply a rhetorical exaggeration of Isokrates... That Plato travelled in Egypt need not be doubted, but that he went to Phoenicia, Chaldaea, and Persia to study philosophy is mere guesswork. What Plato thought of the Egyptians he has told us himself in the Republic (436) when he says that the special characteristic of the Greeks is love of knowledge, of the Phcenicians and Egyptians love of money. If he borrowed no money, he certainly borrowed no philosophy from his Egyptian friends."

F. Max Muller. *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, 1893
Immediately following Plato, beginning with his student Aristotle, the degradation of *philosophia* into "philosophy" began. The "wisdom" which *philosophia* sought was not some vague conceptual understanding as we now use the term. It was the actual achievement of a higher state of consciousness, obtained by self-discipline and mystical contemplation called Dialectic.

"Plato yet more plainly declares that to know oneself is Wisdom and the highest virtue of the soul; for the soul rightly entering into herself will behold all other things, and Deity itself; as verging to her own union and to the centre of all life, laying aside multitude and the variety of all manifold powers which she contains, she ascends to the highest watch-tower of beings. According to Socrates, also, in the *Republic*, we read that Wisdom is generative of truth and intellect; and in the *Theaetetus* Wisdom is defined to be that which gives perfection to things imperfect, and calls forth the latent Intellections of the soul--and again, by Diotima, in the *Banquet*, that mind which is become wise needs not to investigate any further (since it possesses the true Intelligible); that is to say, the proper object of intellectual inquiry in itself; and hence the doctrine of Wisdom according to Plato may be sufficiently obvious."

M. A. Atwood, *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy*

*Philosophia*, properly understood, involves a transformation of one's inner being, a pursuit that rules every aspect of one's life. This acquisition of mystical knowledge does not come from doing research in a university library, it involves a special method of meditative contemplation and an entire way of life.

"In both the classical and the late Christian writers the word philosophy... had a double application. At one time it was taken ethically, or practically, to designate a certain self-mastery in conduct, while at another time its sense is intellectual and seems to rise into the region of pure intuition. The point I would make is that no real inconsistency exists in this double aspect of the word, and that even when most theoretical philosophy still retains, in proper usage, something of its simpler, practical value; it implies always theory as concerned with actual life and as resting on a definite experience of the soul."

Paul Elmer More, *The Religion of Plato*

*Philosophia*, the quest for wisdom, brings the philosopher to higher levels of being. A genuine follower of the tradition of *philosophia* understands that this lower, terrestrial world is in some way a shadow of a higher world. "The key to the wisdom of inner meaning," Suhrawardi said, "is in the knowledge and ability to distinguish the material world from the spiritual world."

"Plato and his brilliant disciples of the Alexandrian School... continued to regard the human mind as an imperfect embryo, separated off from its antecedent Law; and, by this common outbirth into individual life, so made subject to the delusions of sense and phantasy, as to be incapable of true progress or wisdom until it had
been rectified and re-related, as they assure us, even in this world it may be, by certain artificial aids and media, and made conformable to the Divine vision in truth, whence it sprang. And this was, in fact, though Peripatetics have wandered, the true initiatory object and comprehending whole of ancient philosophy; namely, to turn the eye of mind away from sensibles and fix its purified regard on the Supreme Intelligible Law within.

"We are well aware that this kind of philosophy is obsolete; that the capacity of man is considered unequal to the discovery of essential Causes; and that all pretensions to interior illumination have appeared fanciful, and are lightly esteemed in the comparison with modern experimental sciences. It may be a question however whether they, who have determined thus, were competent judges; whether they have at all entered upon the ground of the ancient doctrine to prove it, or studied so far as even to surmise the Method by which the ancients were assisted to propound the mystery of the Causal Principle in life."

M. A. Atwood, *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy*

Ancient sages such as Hermes, Pythagoras, Empedocles, Socrates, and Plato were genuine adepts in *philosophia*, so today they would be given the modern titles of shaman, mystic or magician. They were savants, not scholastics; their goal was to enable their students to *experience* a higher reality, not just comprehend ideas and concepts.

"Aristotle's education was entirely different from that of Plato. Aristotle did not know the secret science of the 'initiates.'

"We are therefore fully entitled to consider Plato as the last exponent and philosophic interpreter of 'ancient wisdom.'"

Andrew Efron, *The Sacred Tree Script*, 1941

Orthodox "philosophy," beginning with Aristotle, became a process of weeding out, as they put it, the esoteric and mystical and proclaiming intellect as the supreme faculty. Aristotle and his successors believed that they were purging human thought of mythical rubbish and replacing it with rationalist explanations which met the tests of logic and common sense. So, from that time till today's inert, “hard-headed” college course in analytic philosophy, the counterfeit has been sold as the genuine.

"Philosophy, as a study of the deeper and more inward facts of consciousness, was rightly contrasted with those encyclical, or secular studies (grammar, rhetoric, mathematics, music, etc.) which are its handmaids; and, as still pragmatic in its method, it was distinguished with equal propriety, though perhaps not with equal regularity, from those bastard overgrowths of eristic, or metaphysics, which are its most inveterate enemies for the very reason that they so subtly resemble it."

Paul Elmer More, *The Religion of Plato*
Philosophia As An Esoteric Tradition

Philosophia, even after all these centuries, remains an esoteric tradition. A person can read, for example, the Phaedo of Plato and completely miss the meaning of philosophia, the search for a higher state of discernment. For many years, I did not fully comprehend what Plato and other "philosophers" were saying, only becoming aware of their true meaning after immersing myself in the Perennial Tradition.

I had studied with some of the best-known American "philosophers" at Yale University in completing my Ph.D., but in all my studies there was never a hint of the esoteric mystery of philosophia. With the understanding gained from my assimilation of the Perennial Tradition, I have been able to re-study "philosophy" in the entirely new mode of philosophia.

In my examination of Plato's writings in this new light, I have come upon extraordinary insights. In the Phaedo, Plato reveals the secret nature of philosophia.

"I hold that the true votary of philosophy [the search for wisdom] is likely to be misunderstood by other men; they do not perceive that his whole practice is of death and dying... When the soul exists in herself, and is released from the body and the body is released from the soul--death, surely, is nothing else than this... In matters of this sort philosophers, above all other men, may be observed in every sort of way to dissoever the soul from its communion with the body..."

"When does the soul attain truth?... Must not true existence be revealed to her in contemplation, if at all?... And contemplation is best when the mind is gathered into herself and none of these things trouble her--neither sounds nor sights nor pain nor any pleasure--when she takes leave of the body, and has as little as possible to do with it, when she has no bodily sense or desire, but is aspiring after true being..."

"If we would have pure knowledge of anything we must be quit of the body--the soul in herself must behold things in themselves; and then we shall attain the wisdom which we desire, and of which we say that we are lovers..."

"True philosophers... are always occupied in the practice of dying..."

If we take that last statement seriously, we're sure to experience psychic upheaval. Philosophia is the practice of dying!? One of the things which makes it difficult to understand this teaching is that it occurs in the context of Socrates’ own experience of final physical death. So it's easy to think that when Socrates speaks of death, he means only the cessation of bodily functions.

But as with all esoteric Perennialist teachings, when interpreted in an unexamined manner, using commonplace meanings, it doesn't make sense. It would be absurd for
Socrates to say that seekers of wisdom are always occupied in the practice of dying if what he means by dying is physical death.

What Plato is referring to is the teaching about "dying before you die" which is one of the central concepts of the Perennial Tradition. *Philosophia*, the love of and the search for wisdom, is the actual practice of learning to leave the body and live in the soul, the spiritual body.

"Take an axe to the prison wall.
Escape.
Walk out like someone suddenly born into color.
Do it now.
You're covered with thick cloud.
Slide out the side.
Die, and be quiet.
Quietness is the surest sign that you've died.
Your old life was a frantic running from silence.
The speechless full moon comes out now."

*Rumi*

This *dying* Plato refers to is not a simple concept to understand or an activity easily practiced, since it contains several levels of meaning. As a preparatory discipline, authentic dying consists in giving up those things which enchain the spirit, divide its interest, and deflect it on the road to Reality—whether these are possessions, habits, friends, interests, hatreds, or desires. Perennialists through the centuries have described how they found it necessary to die to self-love and to all the foolish interests in which their surface consciousness was steeped. They called this purgation or mortification.

"This dying has many degrees, and so has this life. A man might die a thousand deaths in one day and find at once a joyful life corresponding to each of them. . . . The stronger the death the more powerful and thorough is the corresponding life; the more intimate the death, the more inward is the life. Each life brings strength, and strengthens to a harder death. When a man dies to a scornful word, bearing it in God's name, or to some inclination inward or outward, acting or not acting against his own will, be it in love or grief, in word or act, in going or staying; or if he denies his desires of taste or sight, or makes no excuses when wrongfully accused; or anything else, whatever it may be, to which he has not yet died, it is harder at first to one who is unaccustomed to it and unmortified than to him who is mortified."

*R. Tauler. The Inner Way*

In *philosophia*, "dying's" second level of meaning involves the actual practice of learning to leave the physical body and live in the spiritual body.
"Do we believe there is such a thing as death? . . .

"Is it not the separation of soul and body? And when the soul exists in herself, and is released from the body and the body is released from the soul--death, surely, is nothing else than this?

"Just so, he replied. . . . "Then must not true existence be revealed to her [the soul] in contemplation, if at all?

"Yes.

"And contemplation is best when the mind is gathered into herself and none of these things trouble her--neither sounds nor sights nor pain nor any pleasure,--when she takes leave of the body, and has as little as possible to do with it, when she has no bodily sense or desire, but is aspiring after true being?

"Certainly."

Plato, *Phaedo*

"Plato said: 'When freed from my body I beheld luminous spheres.' . . . Of himself, Plato said that in certain of his spiritual conditions he would shed his body and become free from matter. Then he would see light and splendors within his essence. He would ascend to that all-encompassing divine cause, and would seem to be located and suspended in it, beholding a mighty light in that lofty and divine place."

Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi, *The Wisdom of Illuminism*

Philosophia As the Pursuit of Self-Knowledge

As I continued my new study of Plato's writings, I next examined the *Apology*, concentrating on Plato's description of how his teacher, Socrates, had been sentenced to death for allegedly corrupting the Athenian youth and being an atheist.

Even though the ideal of democracy had been established by the Greeks, this era was still dominated by the practice of dictatorial rule. Even in Athens, democracy was subverted by powerful cabals, as was demonstrated in the experience of Socrates. Socrates was charged with subversion, corrupting the morals of young men and spreading atheistic heresy. The background of his political assassination is informative.

Socrates had grown up in a family of good standing, so he moved with ease in the most select circles of society. He served in the army, fighting with great bravery. Shunning luxury, he lived simply. He was unconventional but a patriotic citizen, considering it a great privilege to live in a democracy. He felt he had a serious mission to help his fellow citizens become aware of their assumptions and lack of knowledge and to search
unremittingly for wisdom. Socrates pursued his mission by exploring the mind through verbal interchange--what became known as dialectic.

The previous summer the navy had barely been able to stave off a defeat at the hands of an enemy. The victory cost the navy twenty-five ships and four thousand lives; the commanders of the fleet were charged with criminal negligence for not trying to rescue their men. At that time Socrates had been a senator and a member of the executive committee. Certain political leaders demanded that the commanders be convicted en bloc by a single vote, suspending the regular legal processes. The question of whether or not to suspend the ordinary legal processes finally came to the executive committee and Socrates had alone stood firm, even though all its members' lives were threatened. However, Socrates’ protest was overruled; the military leaders were tried and condemned in a body and six of them were executed.

When a new government came into power, Socrates refused to participate in arresting a rich man whose property the government wished to confiscate. The rich man was seized and murdered, but Socrates' refusal to participate created enemies for him.

It was Socrates' misfortune to have been a friend to persons who had changed allegiance during the recent war or who had been members of the former government. Socrates was suspected of subversive activities, charged with advocating illegal religious concepts, introducing new and unfamiliar religious practices and corrupting the young. The death penalty had been demanded.

The charges against Socrates were the result of widespread hostility against him for his critical spirit of inquiry and his unconventional manner of life. Socrates was tried before five hundred jurors selected by lot. Socrates' defense before the jury was along these lines:

"These calumnies have been raised against me because of a peculiar kind of insight which I possess. I was first made aware of this gift when I heard that the oracle at Delphi had certified that there was no man more wise than Socrates. I began to reflect on this strange assertion. I knew that I was not wise in the ordinary sense, but then I began to realize what the oracle meant.

"I went to a man reputed to be wise, thinking that I would prove the oracle wrong. But as I spoke to this 'wise man' I began to see that he and his admirers only assumed that he was wise, whereas he was actually quite unenlightened and ignorant of many things. This man believed that he had knowledge when in fact he did not, whereas I at least was aware that I had no knowledge. After several such encounters, I realized that my so-called wisdom is in not assuming that I know things when I do not."

Socrates here defines philosofia as freeing oneself from delusions--from assuming one knows things one does not actually know. Philosofia is the pursuit of self-knowledge and the escape from ignorance.
"Philosophy then may be defined to be the soul's discovery of itself, as an entity having a law and interests of its own apart from and above all this mixed and incomprehensible life of the body. That I take it—the soul's deep content in the recognition of itself—is the beginning of the Platonic religion and, if not the beginning, certainly the consummation of Christianity."

Paul Elmer More. *Christian Mysticism*

Most of our mistakes trace back to some deeply hidden self-delusion. For all the help we get in creating these delusions we have to take final responsibility for them. If we are true seekers after wisdom, once we learn that there is even one self-delusion we have allowed to cloud our perception or bias our thinking, we then have the responsibility to begin tracing all these self-defeating elements.

Being asked what is difficult, Thales (an ancient Greek philosopher) replied:
"To know oneself."

But we have likely become habituated to hiding these self-delusions from others and ourselves because we've been conditioned to feel that we have to defend ourselves against all criticism or self-exposure. In many of our dealings with others we compete and struggle for supremacy; we try to get one up on them. Defending our image is of crucial importance; to let others see us, we believe, would destroy us. In the thick of these interpersonal battles, we develop the feeling, understandably enough, that we should try to hide and defend ourselves even against self-disclosure. We feel we can't admit who we are to others, so we don't, even for a moment, admit to ourselves that we are not the glorious creatures we pretend to be.

Lao Tsu (an ancient Chinese sage):
"In the pursuit of learning, every day something is acquired."
"In the pursuit of Tao, every day something is dropped."

Before long such deception becomes a way of life. We feel vulnerable when we seriously begin trying to discover who we really are. We feel we will be destroyed if we allow anyone, even ourselves, to see beyond the self-protective facade we create.

This was undoubtedly why Socrates met with such hatred, to the point of his being condemned to death. He not only worked to free himself from self-delusion but encouraged others to do so as well.

In gaining self-knowledge, we come to understand that we "are concocted from ideas put into us by others" and that what we take to be our self is not our self at all. So we're faced with learning what false and delusory ideas we must decondition from. We decondition so that we can remove ideas and obsessions which we carry around with us that keep us from thinking and behaving reasonably.
"Abandon the search for God and the creation and other matters of a similar sort. Look for him by taking yourself as the starting point. Learn who it is who within you makes everything his own and says, 'My god, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body.' Learn the sources of sorrow, joy, love, hate. Learn how it happens that one watches without willing, rests without willing, becomes angry without willing, loves without willing. If you carefully investigate these matters you will find him in yourself."

Monoimus (quoted by Hippolytus, Refutations)

We must first take full responsibility for our conditioning. The past, other people, our culture may have conditioned us, but we're now fully responsible for what we do with our present mental and emotional state. Most likely we've allowed ourselves to be conditioned to be almost totally other-directed mechanisms who believe whatever our culture or group tells us to believe. Very probably we've allowed ourselves to be conditioned to be persons who do not wish to be self-directed in a real sense—other than according to the myth of "just do what you feel like and you'll be okay." Hence we allow conditioning to take place and perpetuate its effects, the responsibility now accruing to us. So when I refer to being conditioned I mean: ALLOWING ourselves to be conditioned.

The difficulty with trying to understand conditioning is that we are conditioned to believe and feel that we are not conditioned. Or if at all, we believe it is in some minor ways which we either quite consciously chose or which we could easily overcome just by thinking about them. And if we identify culture with conditioning, then we excuse or "accept" conditioning as a necessary process. "Sure I'm conditioned; isn't everyone? So what?"

To explain the important facets of our conditioning, Plato created the Allegory of the Cave, which we'll examine in detail later in chapter nineteen.

In reference to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, not only have the "chains" of our conditioning programmed us to mistake the "shadows"—the delusions, the easy answers, the prejudices of our group—for reality, but we're afraid to find out the truth.

We usually learn the value of delusion-exposure the hard way: through making some catastrophic mistake. Suffering from such mistakes, we may see the importance of overcoming the self-deception that led to our unhappy circumstance. I say "may" because we possess a phenomenal ability to remain totally oblivious to self-deception, even in the midst of abject failure and destruction. So only if we can understand the tremendous value in freeing ourselves from these delusions, will we have any motivation for exposing them.

"Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other."

Benjamin Franklin
He Who Knows His Real Self Knows Reality

A major teaching of the Perennial Tradition is that self-knowledge is a prerequisite to knowledge of Reality. The Hermetic rendition of the Perennial Tradition, long called alchemy, was a spiritual philosophy, not a physical science. The wonderful transmutation of baser metals into gold was a figurative expression of the transformation of man from his natural state into a regenerate condition in which he became aware of his divine nature.

Human beings, it was said in the Wisdom literature, were of the image of God. The Hermetic Emerald Tablet proclaims:

"That which is below corresponds to that which is above, and that which is above corresponds to that which is below, to accomplish the miracles of the one reality."

Because humans are made in the image of God and things on the terrestrial plane are in some way facsimiles of the spiritual plane, self-knowledge is essential if we are to understand Reality.

"He that hath the knowledge of the microcosm, cannot long be ignorant of the knowledge of the macrocosm. This is that which the Egyptian industrious searchers of nature so often said and loudly proclaimed, that every one should know himself. This speech, their dull disciples, the Greeks, took in a moral sense, and in ignorance affixed it to their temples. But I admonish thee, whosoever thou art, that desirest to dive into the inmost parts of nature, if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without thee. He who desires the first place among the students of nature, will nowhere find a greater or better field of study than himself. Therefore, will I here follow the example of the Egyptians, and from my whole heart, and certain true experience proved by me, speak to my neighbor in the words of the Egyptians, and with a loud voice do now proclaim: Oh, man, know thyself; for in thee is hidden the treasure of treasures."

Alipili, a Middle-Eastern sage

Pursuing philosophia as the search for self-knowledge leads ultimately to the understanding that in our essence we are our Higher Self or pre-existent soul.

The Vocation of Philosophia

If we carefully studied the actual practitioners of philosophia, we’d understand it to be a vocation within an active life, a self-transformation in which we become progressively able to see through delusions and face realities, a reawakening of dormant organs of perception which allow us to see and relate to the essence of things.

We’d realize that philosophia helps us develop a discrimination between what we only think we know and what we truly know, as Socrates made so clear. We would learn to seek self-knowledge, exploring the essence of what philosophia was and is, the teaching
within and beyond contemporary "philosophy" and religion and economics and chemistry and all academic disciplines.

In the Apology, Plato reveals how a genuine initiate in philosophia, such as Socrates, practices this vocation.

"While I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting any one whom I meet and saying to him, after my manner: You, my friend--a citizen of this great and mighty and wise city of Athens--are you not ashamed of devoting yourself to acquiring the greatest amount of money and honor and reputation, and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard or heed at all? . . .

"I proceed to interrogate and examine and cross-examine him, and if I think that he has no 'virtue' in him, but only says that he has, I reproach him with undervaluing the greater, and overvaluing the less.

"For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons or your properties, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul."

The Hiddenness of Philosophia

The tradition once called philosophia is active in each era, but is practiced by Perennialist teachers in forms which differ according to the needs of the time. The reality behind philosophia is practiced in our world in ways which ordinary persons would not find easy to discern. What cleansing of our psyches of centuries-old dogmas, myths, and habits might be required to recognize a true practitioner of philosophia, a real teacher of the search for wisdom?

The generalized pattern of habits we call the intellect couldn't hope to grasp this genuine tradition of philosophia fully. We could expect the intellect, on the contrary, to misuse its limitedly useful techniques by dismissing ideas about an original essence of philosophia as nonsense. So only if we seriously began deconditioning ourselves from the blinding influence of the intellect could we hope to understand even the possibility of a genuine tradition of knowledge.

"It is a constant thought of Plato that the ordinary man is not truly awake, but is walking about, like a somnambulist, in pursuit of illusory phantoms. If the dream be taken for substance, as with most of us it happens, that is because the passions pervert our sense of values. 'The pleasures that men know are mixed with pains--how can it be otherwise? For they are mere shadows and painted pictures of the true pleasure, and are coloured by contrast, which so exaggerates both the light and the shade that in a careless mind they beget insane desire of themselves; and they are fought about, as Steisichorus says the Greeks fought about the shadow of Helen at Troy in ignorance of the true
Helen.' Against this witchcraft of the passions the sentence of philosophy, that only Ideas are real, must be repeated by the soul to itself as a charm, until the shadows of the night pass away and in the dawn of another sun than ours we see no longer in signs and symbols, enigmatically, but face to face, as the gods see and know.

"The purging of the passions is thus an initiation into the mysteries of love, whereby the heart is gradually weaned from the obsession of earthly beauty and its progeny to desire of the sweeter loveliness of the virtues, and so to ever higher spheres, until we attain to knowledge of the divine beauty in its utter purity, clear and unalloyed, and not clogged with the pollutions and vanities of earth. Then, if it may be, mortal man becomes the friend of God, himself immortal, capable of bringing forth like God, not the ephemeral children of fashion, but undying realities."

Paul Elmer More. *Christian Mysticism*

Our intellect creates three major assumptions which cause us difficulty in understanding *philosophia* as an embodiment of the Perennial Tradition.

First, academic thinking has trained us to understand "philosophy" as shifting points of view created by individual scholars or schools of thought. But, as Perennialist writings indicate, the Perennial Tradition does not change its basic principles, only its outward forms. If we overcame our habitual assumption we might see that forms which seem to us different ideologies may be the varying expressions of the same fundamentals.

For example, the seeming extreme disparity between Perennialist teachers might be merely the result of diverse expressions of the same underlying science of knowledge. In making this mental shift we could not assume, naively going to the opposite extreme, that all "philosophical" teachings are genuine expressions of the essence that was called *philosophia*. Some of those teachings might be primarily delusional.

Secondly, we could not assume that the Perennial Tradition would think it necessary to explain itself in rational, logical, or merely intellectual terms—even though we might insist that it should. Perennialist teachings point to unrealized organs of understanding which the Perennial Tradition helps to awaken in us. It deliberately de-emphasizes the intellect in its clamoring for exclusive attention.

Again, it would do us no good to try to explain these new organs of awareness in intellectual terms (intuition, mystical insight, astral projection, etc.); we would have to study whatever material is available to us and assist it to re-train our awareness of previously unrecognized realities.

We would find it necessary, thirdly, to overcome the conditioned assumption that *philosophia* would necessarily always have been in visible operation in the West. Until very recently, our political and religious orthodoxies have been so rigid and militant that a genuine tradition could not have operated openly in the West. The various Western religious traditions have been busy for centuries eradicating whatever heretics appeared,
and the academic tradition has excluded anything that didn't fit its scholastic Procrustean bed.

It is a serious question as to how many people could now undertake a genuine search for wisdom. As products of the academic tradition we have become locked into the "banking model" of non-learning, as Paulo Freire (Pedagogy of the Oppressed) so aptly describes it, in which the instructor merely deposits "facts" in passive students. Ordinary teachers would find it difficult to engage in any authentic search for self-knowledge because they are habituated to pontificating (not searching) and students now demand the easy method of non-learning in which they do no more than memorize "facts" (opinions) and blather during so-called "discussions."

While teaching in universities and colleges for over thirty years--from Connecticut to California--I discovered that only the first stages of preparation for real learning and searching can take place in academic classes. That is, only some students use the opportunity to explore their conditioned ideas and habits and begin deconditioning toward self-knowledge. Most students want what they get in academic classes: "facts" spouted by instructors, which they then memorize and return to said instructor, unassimilated. Students learn to play the game superbly and only a few really desire to prepare for real learning.

If we are to search for wisdom, the essence of *philosophia*, we will have to decondition ourselves. If we wish to see a portion of reality through a window pane we will have to clean and repair the glass, or else we will take the cracks, stains and tints for a part of reality when it is only a part of the pane. The essence once called *philosophia*, it appears clear from its writings, involves searching for self-knowledge, dying to self, and working toward a higher state of consciousness.

"Die while you're alive and be absolutely dead. Then do whatever you want: it's all good."

Bunan (1603-1676), Japanese Zen Master

**Plato's Forms and the Western Tradition of Natural Law**

One of Plato's most important contributions to Western thought was his conception of Forms (*idea*, *eidos*). We'll examine his entire concept of Forms in chapter four. Plato viewed the unchanging world of Forms as constituting a system of eternal principles emanating from Absolute Good which the present world merely shadows. Hence, Plato's *Commonwealth* (often mistranslated as *Republic*), his conception of the just state, was to be led by Philosopher-Kings who through their education were prepared "to know the Good through rational insight and embody its ideals by ruling directly over the social order."
Based on Plato's conception of Forms as residing in a supersensible, metaphysical realm, Western thinkers have developed the system of thought called Natural Law.

"Human laws are only copies of eternal laws. Those eternal laws are peculiar to man, for only man, on earth, is a rational being. The test of validity for the state's laws is their conformity to reason. . . . Learned men know that 'Law is the highest reason, implanted in Nature, which commands what ought to be done and forbids the opposite. This reason, when firmly fixed and fully developed in the human mind, is Law. And so they believe that Law is intelligence, whose natural function it is to command right conduct and forbid wrongdoing."

Russell Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*

The alternative view of the social order, Plato pointed out, is anomie: a state of society in which normative standards of conduct and belief are weak or lacking. In the *Commonwealth*, Plato explains the reigning frame of mind within an anomic environment. In the discussion between Socrates and Thrasymachus as to what justice is, Thrasymachus asserts that "justice means nothing else than what is to the interest of the stronger party."

"Rulers may say that they rule in the interest of their people, but the laws they promulgate are ones which they believe to be to their own advantage. And the same is true when the people rule. The laws differ because the interest differs, but what men call 'justice'--the law as it appears on the statute book--is to the interest of whoever has sufficient authority to get it inscribed there. The whole dispute about justice, therefore, is merely verbal except so far as it is reducible to a struggle for power. The enlightened man knows this and acts accordingly. He thus has a great advantage over the naive and simple-minded who still believe that shibboleths like 'justice,' 'honesty,' 'loyalty,' have a real meaning. The enlightened man knows that these are mere words which he can turn to his advantage. The only restraint on his conduct is set by his circumstances. Whatever ruthlessness and ingenuity can obtain, whatever he has strength or cleverness enough to secure--that is his by the 'right' of the stronger."

W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy*

The concept of Natural Law has influenced most societies within Western Civilization, but nowhere was it embodied more fully than in the American Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

Thomas Jefferson explained how this concept of Natural Law had been the foundation of the Declaration of Independence:

"This was the object of the Declaration of Independence. Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before; but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent
stand we are compelled to take. Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, 
or yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an 
expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and 
spirit called for by the occasion. All its authority rests then on the harmonizing 
sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or in 
the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, &c.


When societies such as that of the United States forget their true foundations in 
Natural Law and move to an anomic "law of the jungle," they devolve to a total state of 
barbarism. We are now seeing this in the attacks on American Constitutional liberties 
under the Patriot Act, the mounting of an internationally illegal preemptive war against 
Iraq, and the destruction of democracy through a coup d'etat: election fraud and the 
appointment of a president by a partisan Supreme Court.

In such an anarchical environment, as Plato explained in the Republic, "... in 
politics, the genuine ruler regards his subjects exactly like sheep, and thinks of nothing else, 
night and day, but the good he can get out of them for himself."

"It is this tradition, Platonic and Christian at the centre, this realization of an 
immortal life, once felt by the Greek soul and wrought into the texture of the 
Greek language, that lies behind all our western philosophy and religion. Without 
it, so far as I can see, we should have remained barbarians; and, losing it, so far as 
I can see, we are in peril of sinking back into barbarism."

Paul Elmer More, The Religion of Plato

A major contribution of the Perennial Tradition to human evolution is its preservation 
of fundamental human principles in all aspects of existence. When a culture such as the 
United States goes through a period of imperialistic dictatorship, for example, it is 
necessary that the original principles on which the nation was founded be preserved and the 
people provided a means through which to rediscover its democratic heritage. I have 
attempted in my earlier book, America, Awake! to provide such a means.

This current book attempts to present a synopsis of the elemental foundation-points of 
Plato’s embodiment of the Perennial Tradition. It also includes, in its esoterica, clues which 
the discerning reader can use to develop a higher awareness.

The Genuine Tradition of Philosophia Persists

We must realize that genuine philosophy does not involve a superficial glossing over 
of the received writings of Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, or Kant, with the presumption 
that we can understand everything there is in them with our present intellectual abilities or 
that they represent the genuine tradition of philosophy.
Contemporary academic disciplines condition us to assume that we can gain genuine understanding of anything through the mere study of the writings and traditions we now possess. Our present educational system is based on the Medieval scholastic model which came into being primarily through the rediscovery of classical written material and the exegetical substantiation of "revealed Truth."

"One who seeks God through logical proof is like someone searching for the sun with a lamp."

Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (1154-1191), The Wisdom of Illuminism

The tradition called *philosophia* was never intended to become, exclusively, a written course of study. Authentic philosophers always include both exoteric as well as esoteric strands in their teaching. *Philosophia* assists people to break through delusions to a grasp of truth. Its written and oral expressions are not intended to become fossilized "scriptures" or university textbooks on which to build systems of dogma. Something life-giving is not expressed in ways intended to become academic "holy writ," to serve as proof-texts and excuses for mere pedantry and dilettantish blather. Any real Perennialist teaching is an organic process which is assimilated rather than twisted into a totem.

"For the Peripatetics writing philosophy was a matter of recording arguments and conclusions in proper syllogistic form, but Pythagoras had shown the unwisdom, and Plato the impossibility, of recording the deepest philosophical teachings in writing. The writing of philosophy was a dialectical endeavor, requiring both knowledge and a subtle sense of how to guide the student through the various levels of knowledge. The books were never intended to be used alone to teach the full Illuminationist philosophy."

John Walbridge. *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks*

Plato’s embodiment of the Perennial Tradition—the original tradition of *philosophia*—is completely different from what is now called "philosophy" in modern universities.

"In regard to few professional philosophers and men of letters is there any evidence that they did very much in the way of fulfilling the necessary conditions of direct spiritual knowledge. When poets or metaphysicians talk about the subject matter of the Perennial Philosophy, it is generally at second hand. But in every age there have been some men and women who chose to fulfill the conditions upon which alone, as a matter of brute empirical fact, such immediate knowledge can be had; and of these a few have left accounts of the Reality they were thus enabled to apprehend and have tried to relate, in one comprehensive system of thought, the given facts of this experience with the given facts of their other experiences."

Aldous Huxley *The Perennial Philosophy*

Even during Plato's time, philosophy had been deformed by the sophists into a pandering to the emotions of the masses. Socrates explained in the *Commonwealth*: "I do
not wonder that the many refuse to believe; for they have never seen that of which we are now speaking; they have seen only a conventional imitation of philosophy, consisting of words artificially brought together.

We are most fortunate to have the writings of Plato, because through a discerning study of their content and process, we can rediscover just how the Perennial tradition operates in its initiatory mode.

The deeper meaning of Plato's philosophy is not easy to discern, requiring dedicated study and a learned ability to balance between extremes. But when discernment begins to be felt, the sheer magic of Plato's Higher World of Ideas becomes progressively more clear.

"Even as I write these words, sitting in a study surrounded by books, this is how the truth of his [Plato's] doctrine comes home to me. What is the reality? I ask myself. Surely not these material volumes arranged in lines upon their shelves. Merely as objects made of paper and ink and cardboard and leather, though they impress themselves upon the eye as substantial, though they are palpable to the hand, yet they awaken little or no interest, respond to no vital need, and of themselves have no significance. So far as they possess reality, it is by their content of Ideas, the inner life of their authors gone out into image and story and conjecture, which for all these years has been the material of my thought and the food of my own deeper life. In this sense the intangible Ideas, somehow caught in the printed word and somehow released by the act of perusal, are alive as prisoners are alive in their cells, who by the magic opening of doors are set free.

“Almost they seem to flutter about me here in the light of day, to brush my cheek with delicate fingers, to take form and fashion and quaint design, to speak with audible breath, to woo me forth from the body into their own more etherial world. They were the same yesterday as today, while the printed record has been crumbling away; they may abide when the solid-seeming books have fallen into dust. Yet how and where, in the interval between their setting down and their taking up, do they abide? By what secret tract is their existence in the mind of the author connected with their resuscitation in the mind of the reader? Why at the sight of certain lines and figures on the voiceless page do these particular thoughts spring up into renewed activity? What is the indiscernable nexus between the physical vibrations of light and these immaterial substances of our noetic life? . . .

“By such distinctions I lay hold of a strange philosophy which tells me that the soul's assurance of truth is not a dream evoked arbitrarily by any man's imagination, but an intuition more or less perfectly grasped of veritable realities. These books on which I depend for most of my noetic life are effective just as they are a history of what has been known of these realities by other souls in the past and set down for the recreation of any who can spell out the record. So do they charm into peace because they lure us to the belief that some time, if not here and now, our soul may be lifted to that world of immutable Ideas which lie in all their
splendour before the eye of Plato's God."

Paul Elmer More. *Christian Mysticism*

Whatever may be going on in the ordinary world, the real practitioners of *philosophia* continue the genuine work of acquiring enhanced capabilities of apprehension, using completely different terms and names--thereby becoming unrecognizable to the heedless.

That Plato’s *philosophia*, the genuine love of wisdom, is practically unknown by modern man does not mean that it is not still practiced in its essence, the "exact science of the regeneration of the human soul from its present sense-immersed state into the perfection and nobility of that divine condition in which it was originally created."
Chapter Four: Plato's Disclosure of Forms

One of Plato's most important contributions to Western thought was his conception of Forms (ideai, eide). Plato saw ultimate reality composed of two distinct "worlds," domains, or dimensions of being. The world of physical objects in space and time consist of instantiations or embodiments of Forms. Such objects are known through sense perception and ordinary thought. Apart from this is the nonphysical, nonspatial, nontemporal, universal, eternal metaphysical world of Forms known only through philosophic reflection—beyond ordinary experience and requiring special capabilities in Dialectic to apprehend.

To explain what he meant by Forms, Plato referred to such entities as "table," "triangle," "justice," "beauty," and "the good." "Triangle," for example, is that metaphysical entity which is known by a geometrician when he examines physical triangles drawn in chalk or ink or referred to in ordinary thought as "a plane figure enclosed by three straight lines."

Physical triangles are representations of the Form “triangle” on blackboards, pieces of paper, or computers screens that are never perfect planes. Our chalk or ink or digital lines have breadth, while the Form "Triangle" is outside spatial dimensions. While a physical triangle is never identical to the Form "Triangle," as an embodiment of the Form it does have some resemblance and can help us reflect on, search for, and discover the Form. The Form "Triangle" is universal and metaphysical; it’s embodied in a physical entity at a particular time and place.

In the dialogue Meno, Plato describes a form as the "common nature" possessed by a group of things or concepts. Speaking of virtue he says:

"And so of the virtues, however many and different they may be, they have all a common nature which makes them virtues; and on this he who would answer the question, 'What is virtue?' would do well to have his eye fixed."

The Forms are eternal and changeless, but enter into a partnership with changeable matter to produce objects and concepts we perceive in the physical world. Physical objects are instantiations, expressions, or manifestations of the Forms and are always in a state of change: becoming and expiring, moving in space, evolving, etc. Since the ever-changing temporal world participates in a succession of Forms, it can only be the source of opinion, not knowledge.

Plato likens the opinions derived from our senses to the perception of shadows of real objects cast upon the wall of a cave. True knowledge, however, is the perception of the archetypal Forms themselves, which are real, eternal, and unchanging.

Plato distinguishes between the two worlds in terms of what kind of knowledge is possible in each and what powers and processes are used to gain this knowledge. In reference to the higher, metaphysical world, we have a Higher Self or Soul which enables
us to gain true understanding and genuine knowledge. The bodily senses and the ordinary intellect which report about the physical world, provide only belief and opinion. Plato provides further explanation in the *Commonwealth*.

"When its [the soul's] gaze is fixed upon an object irradiated by truth and reality, the soul gains understanding and knowledge and is manifestly in possession of intelligence. But when it looks towards that twilight world of things that come into existence and pass away, its sight is dim and it has only opinions and beliefs which shift to and fro, and now it seems like a thing that has no intelligence. . . .

"This, then which gives to the objects of knowledge their truth and to him who knows them his power of knowing, is the Form or essential nature of Goodness. It is the cause of knowledge and truth; and so, while you may think of it as an object of knowledge, you will do well to regard it as something beyond truth and knowledge and precious as these both are, of still higher worth. . . . So with the objects of knowledge: these derive from the Good not only their power of being known, but their very being and reality; and Goodness is not the same thing as being, but even beyond being, surpassing it in dignity and power."

While Forms are invisible to the eye, our souls have participated in the eternal world of Forms prior to our incarnation in a physical body and retain a memory of them. Although this memory is not readily accessible to the conscious mind, its presence can be discovered through a special methodology of Dialectic and analysis of perception. Plato maintains that the philosopher can achieve the capability of perceiving the Forms directly, with his "mind's eye," by:

- Developing skill in discerning the conceptual qualities common to groups of things and ideas in the temporal world
- Realizing that these are merely hypotheses
- Employing the method of Dialectic to categorize and group the qualities in their correct relationships and order
- Using the hypotheses as stepping stones to further hypotheses

Thus Reason or Higher Thought is able to construct a hierarchy of Forms, to scale to the height of first principle and attain a state of true knowledge. Plato viewed the unchanging world of Forms as constituting a system of eternal principles emanating from Absolute Good which the present world merely shadows. Hence, Plato's *Commonwealth*, his discussion of the Idea of Justice, delineates the need for a commonwealth to be lead by Philosopher-Kings who through their education are prepared "to know the Good through rational insight and embody its ideals by ruling directly over the social order."

**Explications of Forms in Other Perennialist Literature**

To assist in understanding the complex nature of Forms, we'll examine three explanations outside Plato's writings:
1. *The Bhagavad Gita*

   VII:7 "All the worlds have their rest in me, as many pearls strung on a string."

   "The simile is one of faith, but not of blind faith. One of the points is, that the string is invisible, being hidden by the pearls strung on it. But a second point is that the string is known to be there; otherwise the pearls would not remain in order but would be scattered. In the same way the order of the world shows that there is an underlying intelligence which holds it together, which integrates it."

   Trevor Leggett, *Realization of the Supreme Self: The Bhagavad Gita Yogas*

2. *The Bhagavad Gita*

   VII:10 "And I am from everlasting the seed of eternal life. I am the intelligence of the intelligent. I am the beauty of the beautiful."

   Here the Form, manifesting as Krishna, is the Godhead speaking. How marvelous is the thought that the Divine Form is the beauty that we see in many different beautiful entities: people, nature, deeds, and ideas. He is that Higher Element of intelligence which we see shimmering in intelligent people, intelligent interchange, and intelligent behavior. The Higher Essence of all particular beautiful things is Beauty.

3. Boethius, *The Emboldenment of Philosophy*

   "Now, no one can deny that something exists which is a kind of fountain of all goodness; for everything which is found to be imperfect shows its imperfection by the lack of some perfection. It follows that if something is found to be imperfect in its kind, there must necessarily be something of that same kind which is perfect. For without a standard of perfection we cannot judge anything to be imperfect."

   **Forms As Portals to the Supersensible World**

   To understand how Perennialist teachings concerning Forms provide an entree to a supersensual world, we must begin with the most fundamental questions. Why is our physical world not governed by incoherent chaos? Why is this "Cosmos" (as the Greeks termed it) intelligible to humans? What is the essence of these organizing principles: "pattern," "structure," "form," and "order?"

   Pythagoras and Plato believed that elements in our empirical world are ordered by supersensual Forms residing in a higher dimension. These Forms were necessary to explain the structure we see in the world around us. The only reason the physical universe is intelligible at all is that objects retain the same form, different things take on the same form, and we are able to communicate with one another about the meaning of these
patterns and relationships.

Our bodies, for example, undergo complete change within a seven year cycle—every atom being replaced by new atoms. How it that we retain the same form when everything substantial has been replaced?

Why is it that completely different objects are somehow "the same" with respect to this or that organizing principle: (height, color, chairness, etc.)? No one would doubt that two chairs are somehow instances of the same thing: the form Chair. But how can two things made of completely different physical stuff, two things that are not identical, be the same with respect to Chairness, but different with respect to, say, Height?

It's easy to just shrug these fundamental questions off and say that the existence of similarity needs no explanation; it simply is. But we must ask:

- How is it that we can tell that things are the same?
- How can we recognize that things have distinct forms?
- What is the nature of these Forms in which physical objects participate?

Pythagoras and Plato believed that Forms are neither material objects, aspects of material objects, nor mere concepts in our brains—they exist on their own terms, apart from the physical universe, eternal and immutable. Physical objects are what they are by virtue of their participation in specific Forms.

Aristotle maintained that these Forms are merely "aspects" of physical objects and have no separate being in a supersensual world. Modern scientists such as Rupert Sheldrake have come up with theories similar to Aristotle’s, seeing forms as merely constituents of objects. Sheldrake called this process of retaining the same form "morphic resonance."

Most modern scientists ignore metaphysical questions about the essence of Forms. But we cannot avoid this question if we take seriously what Perennialist teachers have maintained: that humans have the capacity to attain a higher state of consciousness through understanding the supersensual world of Forms or Ideas.

"Within the human consciousness is the unique ability to perceive the changing forms of our actual world. The content of our experience results from an immaterial transparency between absolute, permanent relationships, contained in the insubstantial forms of a geometric order, and the transitory, abstract, geometric architecture which is composed of harmonic waves of energy, nodes of relationality, melodic forms springing forth from the eternal realm of geometric proportion."

Robert Lawlor, Sacred Geometry
Mathematics and especially geometry were seen by such Perennialist teachers as Pythagoras and Plato as among the most effective means of understanding and entering a spiritual realm composed of eternal, unchanging (invariant) Forms or Ideas. In Plato's *Commonwealth*, Socrates says that only those versed in geometry will be allowed entrance into the ideal state.

"For Pythagoras, mathematics was a bridge between the visible and invisible worlds. He pursued the study of mathematics not only as a way of understanding and manipulating nature, but also as a means of turning the mind away from the physical world, which he held to be transitory and unreal, and leading it to the contemplation of eternal and truly existing things that never vary. He taught his students that by focusing on the elements of mathematics, they could calm and purify the mind, and ultimately, through disciplined effort, experience true happiness."

John Strohmeier and Peter Westbrook, *The Life and Teachings of Pythagoras*
Chapter Five: Plato’s Conception of Knowledge as Self-Evolvement

Human civilization is the evolutionary assimilation of Perennialist wisdom in all dimensions of human life. The expansion of human consciousness moves in an ebb and flow progression. Generations experiencing a retrogressive phase—such as our present age—sometimes wonder when the next period of advancement will occur. What must transpire before progression can continue is that a dynamic grouping must form around a teaching divulging an adaptation of the Perennial Tradition for that age.

During the earlier Dark Ages in Europe and our own present Dark Age, ignorance of the Perennialist heritage contributes to our degraded, coarsened state. In such times of decline, one of the primary elements of the Perennial Tradition which is submerged is the understanding and practice of its arcane form of knowledge.

In the author's recently published books and essays, the first four aspects of the arcane form of Perennialist knowledge are explicated as:

1. Transmission of the knowledge of the Perennial Tradition through progressive adaptation of the teaching to the time, the place, and the persons involved
2. Knowledge through prescription of specific experience by a Perennialist teacher
3. Experiential participation in higher consciousness
4. Disclosure of high knowledge through Perennialist art

In this chapter, we'll explore the fifth aspect, knowledge as self-evolvement as first explicated by Plato and later developed by the Cambridge Platonists. We'll begin by examining how the West arrived at its present Cartesian-Baconian-Newtonian concept of knowledge as imposed authority.

“There are two modes of knowledge, through argument and experience (experientia). Argument brings conclusions and compels us to concede them, but it does not cause certainty nor remove doubts in order that the mind may remain at rest in truth, unless this is provided by experience."

Roger Bacon, *Opus Maius* (1268)

The Scholastic Concept of Knowledge As Imposed Authority
Throughout the Middle Ages, Western thought stagnated largely because of its conception of knowledge as derived from argument from authority—whether the authority of the Church or the State. Europe languished in intellectual and cultural retrogression during the Dark Ages, while the light of Perennialist wisdom was preserved and advanced by the enlightened strata of those labeled "the infidel Saracen."

Beginning immediately after Jesus' death, the perversion and distortion of his teachings began. Within three centuries, Christianity had become a sacerdotal deformity serving the goals of the Roman state and a bloated ecclesiastical bureaucracy.

If you watch a TV history of Christianity or read a Protestant or Roman Catholic account of the early church, Christianity's becoming the official religion of the Roman state during Constantine's reign is considered a great victory. The only measure of success for these moderns is whether or not a tradition triumphed over all its competitors. Never mind what distorting of the original message had taken place, if a particular religion came out on top, it's to be considered the best.

On the contrary, the formal religion that became known as the Holy Roman Church was and is nothing but a vast repository of false teachings and practices. At the present time, what is called Christianity, in all its Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant guises, is a horrible deformity of Jesus’ original teachings.

The Augustinian Darkness

Augustine (396-430 CE) was the person who would fix the deadly thought-structure for the Middle Ages.

"The history of religion and dogma in the West, from the beginning of the fifth century to the Reformation, is so pervasively dominated by Augustine that one must treat it as a single period. . . . The whole of the Middle Ages in the history of dogmatics is but an era of transition; it is the time of the adjustment of the Church to Augustine and to all of the numerous impulses deriving from him."

Adolf Harnack, Outlines of the History of Dogma

With Augustine, we experience the tragedy of a brilliant mind that gained some insight into the essence of the mystical tradition through his study of Plato and others. But Augustine degenerated into self-deceiving zealotry in total service to the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church.

Here was a person who experienced mystical insight in his early life but wound up a homicidal monster insisting that anyone dissenting from the "true Roman Catholic faith" be tortured and killed. This hideous aspect of the murderous zealot faces us within all organized religions.

"Augustine found his real freedom only after renunciation. . . . Thereafter he is
convinced that this is the only way by which man can attain to peace of God; and
that the meaning of religious redemption consists neither in thinking nor in doing,
but in suffering. Augustine saw the Pauline doctrine of election by grace in the light
of his own personal experience; and only in this light was he able to interpret this
doctrine. And presently he turns it about and applies it to the objective field. The
absolute sovereignty of the divine will, limited by no human norms or standards,
becomes the point of departure for his doctrine of the unconditional authority of the
church. The human understanding and the human will retain no independent rights
either before God Himself or before the church, God's image; for such rights could
only mean the return of that stubbornness which must be conquered and destroyed
by means of religious faith."


Plato's philosophy had made it clear that humans possess a divine light within their
souls which enables them to re-ascend to their original blessed status. Plato explained that
the search for wisdom was a formidable challenge and that only some persons would be
capable of achieving the illustrious status of philosopher (lover of wisdom). The pernicious
effect of Augustine's warped dogmas was to make unthinking people believe that human
reason was an affront to God. Augustine asserted that reason cannot help man in his fallen
state, that only revelation can provide salvation for his corrupted soul. The revelation
which humans must accept, of course, was that deemed authentic by Augustine and the
Church. And since reason had no right to appraise revelation, humans must accept the
decrees of the Church without question or dissent. The Augustinian darkness had fallen
over the Western world and it was to retain its evil influence for the next thousand years.

**Aristotelian Scholasticism**

One of the other pernicious influences on the West during the Dark Ages was the
thought system of Aristotle. Quick to use anything available to prop up the malformation
called Christianity, Thomas Aquinas (1215-1274 CE) ensonced Aristotle as the Great
Authority on all questions, both natural and supernatural--as long as his ideas didn't clash
with the "received revelation" of the holy Mother Church.

Around 300 BCE, Aristotle's library had been relocated to Alexandria. The Platonic
Academy in Athens and the Neoplatonic school in Alexandria operated in parallel for eight
centuries.

After the fall of Rome and after Justinian closed Plato's Academy and Aristotle'
Lyceum in 529 CE, the majority of the major texts of Greek philosophy became
unavailable to the West. Following the disruption of the Alexandrian school by the
conquering Persians in 616 CE, and the burning of the Alexandrian library ordered by
Caliph Omar I in 642 CE, only Byzantium remained as a stronghold of Greek learning.

Islamic scholars in the Near East saved many of the ancient manuscripts they found
in Byzantine libraries and from the richest library in the ancient world, the library at
Alexandria. Islamic scholars like Avicenna (980-1037 CE) and Averroës (1126-1198 CE) as well as the Jewish scholar Moses Maimonides (1135-1204 CE), studied these manuscripts and wrote commentaries on them. By the twelfth century, these manuscripts as well as the commentaries on them, made their way back into Europe by way of Spain, Sicily and North Africa. By the middle of the thirteenth century, French and Italian universities were awash with these ancient texts, especially the philosophical works of Aristotle.

As Augustine's doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of the divine will and the unconditional authority of the Church became unquestionable Christian dogmas, now Aristotle's system was added as another bulwark against apostasy and dissent. The primary force of this Scholastic system—as it was termed—was that authority—that of the Church or that of Aristotle—was "limited by no [ordinary] human norms or standards." The imposition of dogma was absolute—and death by torture was the prescribed punishment for dissent.

Christianity was the matrix of medieval life: even cooking instructions called for boiling an egg “during the length of time wherein you say a Miserere.” It governed birth, marriage, and death, sex, and eating, made the rules for law and medicine, gave philosophy and scholarship their subject matter. Membership in the Church was not a matter of choice; it was compulsory and without alternative, which gave it a hold not easy to dislodge.


It's not too difficult to understand the mind-set of the Dark Ages—both in its dogmatic Christian and Aristotelian-Scholastic aspects—since many people in the twenty-first century have returned to the same mindless submission to a Roman Catholic Church which allows its priests to sexually abuse children—without penalty—and a demonic cabal which denies scientific research (such as global warming) to excuse its plundering of the environment.

It's a challenge for us to comprehend how Aristotle's ideas—which now seem absurd—totally dominated human thinking during the Dark Ages. Aristotle's cosmological work *On The Heavens* was the most influential treatise of its kind in the West, accepted as authoritative for more that eighteen centuries from its inception (around 350 BCE) until the works of Copernicus in the early 1500s CE. In this work Aristotle discussed the general nature of the cosmos and certain properties of individual bodies.

Aristotle believed that all bodies are made up of four elements: earth, water, air and fire. These elements naturally move up or down, fire being the lightest and earth the heaviest. Most composite objects have the features of the element which dominates. But since the elements in, for example, a worm, are not where they belong (the fiery part is too low, being bound by the earth part, which is a bit too high), then the worm is imperfect. All things on earth are thus imperfect. The idea that all bodies, by their very nature, have a natural way of moving is central to Aristotelian cosmology.
Each of the four elements has its own "sphere," which is how Aristotle explained what we now call gravity. Like attracts like: thus earth falls through fire, air and water; air, on the other hand, rises through water, and water rises from earth in springs. A sphere for fire (though invisible) was needed to explain the fact that fire appears to rise through air. Everything under the sphere of the moon was subject to decay and change; everything above was immutable.

Aristotle's unfounded theories led to many ideas that later proved incorrect—that comets were closer to the earth than the moon, for example, since they could clearly not be in the unchanging sphere that contained the "fixed" stars. Aristotle constructed his view of the Universe on the basis of his impulsive feelings of holistic harmony. Central to his philosophy was the concept of teleology or final causation. He supposed that individual objects (e.g. a falling rock) and systems (e.g. the motion of the planets) subordinate their behavior to an overall plan or destiny. This was especially apparent in living systems where the component parts function in a cooperative way to achieve a final purpose or end product.

In trying to explain an object in motion, for example an arrow in flight, Aristotle said the archer's arm provides an original impetus forward, but after the arrow leaves the thrower's hand (since the arm can't continue to push it forward), the arrow should fall to earth immediately since there's nothing obvious pushing it. Aristotle's "answer" was that as the arrow flies through the air, it leaves a vacuum behind it. Air rushing in pushes the arrow forward until its natural motion (falling) eventually brings it to earth.

To us it seems incomprehensible that people wouldn't have investigated for themselves how things worked, how objects behaved. For example, Aristotle stated that the motion of a cannon ball must be straight forward to a certain point, and then straight down. Anyone could have taken the trouble to observe that the actual motion of a cannon ball was an arc.

But during this time, scholars were only interested in what authority they could find to answer a question, not what they could discover for themselves. And common people were content to accept the arguments of the authorities. This is where Roger Bacon's dichotomy reappears: "There are two modes of knowledge, through argument and experience." The Medieval scholastic was only interested in argument from authority: whether Church dogmatists such as Augustine or Aquinas or a secular authority like Aristotle. But within a short time, experience would be felt as a force.

Whatever totally unfounded idea Aristotle had come up with seemed perfectly acceptable to the Medieval thinker. Concerning the causes which start things moving, such as the archer moving the arrow, Aristotle realized he didn't want to end up with an infinite chain of causes. So he stated that there must be an "unmoved mover," something which can initiate motion without itself being set in motion. This view, without support of any kind, was preserved by the medieval Church during the Dark Ages and became the ruling dogma.
Slowly, Medieval man awoke from his dogmatic slumbers and began to examine the world for himself, referring to his own experience. Over the centuries of the Dark Ages, various strains of the Perennial Tradition were introduced and fostered by a number of creative scholars such as Boethius, Pope Sylvester II, Bernard of Clairvaux, Roger Bacon, Meister Eckhart, John Tauler, Nicholas of Cusa, Marsilio Ficino, Leonardo da Vinci, Pico della Mirandola, Erasmus, John Colet, Nicolaus Copernicus, Thomas More, Paracelsus, Giordano Bruno, Galileo, Johann Kepler, Benjamin Whichcote, and Henry More. Each of these thinkers dared to work against the degrading impulses of the Church and Scholasticism, encouraging and participating in the investigation of human experience. Such dissent from a totalitarian church and an entrenched Scholasticism resulted in imprisonment or death for some of these intrepid adventurers.

The re-emphasis of the Perennial Tradition—including its Hermetic and Platonic embodiments—through the confluence of European and Muslim thought, beginning around 1000 CE, now made the Perennialist concept and practice of knowledge more accessible in the West.

"Our own generation enjoys the legacy bequeathed to it by that which preceded it. We frequently know more, not because we have moved ahead by our own natural ability, but because we are supported by the menial strength of others, and possess riches that we have inherited from our forefathers. Bernard of Clairvaux used to compare us to punt dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature."

John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon*, 1159-60

The Perennialist form of knowledge, which has always been active in the West (as well as the East), now entered a new embodiment which would ultimately lead to what was called "the scientific method." However, thinkers developing the new concept of science apprehended and adapted only part of the Perennialist form of knowledge and mixed these with negative elements leading to the defective concept of science as imposed authority.

"Once people envisioned the possibility of change in a fixed order, the end of an age of submission came in sight; the turn to individual conscience lay ahead."

Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century*

**The Dogmatisms of Puritanism and Empiricism**

While the positive Perennialist forces were helping to bring about a Renaissance in Europe, hard at work were baleful influences leading to suppression of human freedom and creativity: empiricism and Puritanism.
"Just as puritanism sets up the ideal of an active faith, so empiricism sets up the ideal of an active philosophy. They both reject mere contemplation and speculation; both demand, for the truth they advocate, a new concrete and practical verification."

Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, 1953

The imposition of arbitrary religious, philosophical, and political decrees was the dominant idea developed by Martin Luther, John Calvin, Francis Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, Isaac Newton, and others in the mechanist-materialist-empiricist or Puritan thought-molds. Puritanism and empiricism thought they had gone beyond Scholasticism, but they had merely rejected some of its aspects while retaining most of its negative features. For all of the major figures in the mechanist-empiricist school the primary motif was to seek knowledge for the sake of power. The final justification of the realization of knowledge resided alone in the imposition of arbitrary will. Nature reveals its secrets, Francis Bacon maintained, if we put her "on the rack," coercing her to give up her secrets—just as a heretic is put on the rack and gives up his apostasy. According to Hobbes, knowledge should serve the ends of political power. Both these men—and their followers—maintained that we must force reality to reveal itself to us, as we already know it to be. Therefore, truth requires no evaluation by Reason. The absolute sovereignty of the divine will (read Church) and the will of the ruler ordained of God allowed no appraisal by ordinary human norms or standards.

Most empiricists were materialists, maintaining that in perception there is only sensation, with "thought," "self," and "imagination" relegated to the realm of shadowy unrealities. Rene Descartes' concept of a mechanical universe included the idea that organisms are machines. He reasoned that even though humans possess an immaterial soul, it still resides in a mechanical body.

The methodology of fiat—imposed authority and arbitrary decree—was seen as the foundation of both science and human social structure. Descartes wrote Mersenne in 1630: "God sets up mathematical laws in nature, as a king sets up laws in his kingdom."

"My God us keep
From Single vision & Newton's sleep."

William Blake

While much is made of Francis Bacon's contribution to the theory of science, a closer look convinces us that he did not contribute to the formation of the scientific method, but to a deformed conception of imposition of authority on human will.

If we compare Bacon's thought to that of Kepler or Galileo, we see a completely different mode of thought. Bacon saw Kepler’s concept of hypothesis as a “false anticipation.” Nature, Bacon asserted, must be studied through essentially a juridical
process, sitting as judge over reality, “questioning it as one examines the accused,” as Ernst Cassirer says in *The Platonic Renaissance in England*. Bacon believed that nature must be “put to the rack,” made the victim of an inquisition, “for like as a man's disposition is never well known or proved till he be crossed... so nature exhibits herself more clearly under the trials and vexations of art than when left to herself.”

As Francis Bacon's pseudo-science was essentially a system of imposing the will of religious or political tyrants on the people, the same holds true for Thomas Hobbes.

“It is one of the principal assumptions of empiricism that identical laws govern and determine both natural and social existence. Hobbes supplements the work of Bacon on this point; Bacon's view of nature is Hobbes's view of society and the state. The motif *scientia propter potentiam* (knowledge for the sake of power) becomes Hobbes's criterion of speculation.

“Political science should serve the ends of political power; it should lead finally to the foundation of a *regnum hominis* in this most characteristic province of man, hitherto least subject to rational control and given over to despotism and anarchy. This subjugation must follow basically the same lines as the conquest of nature... To understand the state, one must first resolve it into its basic elements and then reconstruct it from them. The result is a strictly atomistic theory of the state and of society. The will of the state, to be grounded in reality, must be deduced from individual wills and represented as the summation of these wills. A contract between individuals forms the foundation of the state. But if this foundation is to be firmly laid, if the state is not, when scarcely formed, immediately to break up into its parts again, then some provision must be made so that this contract, once entered into, becomes inviolable. In its origin arbitrary and submitted to the free decision of individuals, the contract once in effect must therefore in its continuance be permanent and unalterable. Through human choice something is created which henceforth ends all choice, which leaves no free scope for individual likes and dislikes, but subjects these to inescapable coercion and absolute authority. It is thus the rigorous will to govern which leaves its impress on all of Hobbes' theoretical investigations and deductions; and it is the juridical right of coercion to which all political and social existence is to be traced back, and on which alone it is to be based.”


While the empiricists pretended to be free from the prejudices of irrational religion and Scholasticism, they were essentially dogmatists still steeped in Medieval fantasies. Western scholars had assumed that a totemic figure such as Isaac Newton was above offensive occult influence—a man of purely materialistic science. It thus came as a shock when in 1936 Newton's manuscripts were auctioned off by his inheritors at Sotheby's. John Maynard Keynes summarized what came to light about Newton:
"Newton was not the first of the age of reason. He was the last of the magicians . . .
He looked on the whole universe and all that is in it as a riddle, as a secret which
could be read by applying pure thought to certain evidence, certain mystic clues
which God had laid about the world to allow a sort of philosopher's treasure hunt to
the esoteric brotherhood. He believed that these clues were to be found partly in the
evidence of the heavens and in the constitution of elements (and this is what gives
the false suggestion of his being an experimental natural philosopher), but also
partly in certain papers and traditions handed down by the brethren in an
unbroken chain back to the original cryptic revelation in Babylonia. He regarded
the universe as a cryptogram set by the Almighty." ¹

Newton believed he was among the few who were privileged to receive esoteric
knowledge. He dealt in alchemy as a method of discovering truth. As Gregory Bateson has
correctly stated, "Newton did not discover gravity; he invented it." What Newton did was
to delve deeply into alchemical concepts for his answers, while clothing them in the idiom of
his mechanical system. The centerpiece of the Newtonian system, gravitational attraction,
was in fact the alchemical principle of sympathetic forces, which Newton saw as a creative
principle, a source of divine energy in the universe. When the new hypotheses of Einstein
took hold in the twentieth century, it became clear that Newton's concept of gravitation
was merely a contrived theory.

Knowledge As Self-Evolvement

Around the year 1050 CE, a Perennialist teacher named al-Hujwiri wrote in his
Kashf-al-Mahjub (Revelation of the Veiled Mysteries):

"There are three forms of culture: worldly culture, the mere acquisition of
information; religious culture, following rules; elite culture, self-development."

Western culture assimilated parts of the Perennialist concept and practice of
knowledge--experience as experiment and the use of Forms (mathematical, logical,
conceptual) to comprehend reality--and thereby developed the scientific method. However,
as we've seen, these ideas were admixed with other negative elements such as mechanism,
materialism, empiricism, and repression to produce a devil's brew called "empirical
science," resulting in such "scientifically" designed monstrosities as propagandism (sold as
education), barbarity (shilled as entertainment), fascism (passed off as state capitalism), and
plutocracy (pretending to be democracy).

To the discerning thinker, it's clear that the system called "empirical science" has
proven to be defective in its basic structure. For example, one of its offspring, the disarray
called state capitalism, has devolved, in the twenty-first century, into militaristic
imperialism, police-state fascism, and criminal plutocracy.

"The human being . . . instead of reaching within himself in a certain manner in
order to find and attain his development, searches outside, and follows illusions
(metaphysical systems wrongly developed) which in fact cripple him." ²
Without assimilating all aspects of Perennialist knowledge into a conception of science, such malformations inevitably result. To those persons capable of seeing the deformities which "empirical science" has spawned, it's clear that we must now regain an understanding of those disregarded elements of the Perennial Tradition which make genuine human knowledge possible.

Because of our reliance on a critically flawed conception of human knowledge--"empirical science"--we've created a world in which power and wealth determine what is to be thought of as knowledge. For the sake of our very lives, we must work to gain an understanding of what genuine knowledge is and how it can assist us in creating a benevolent way of life which will serve the interests of all humankind.

"It might be said that the scientific approach has most often been: 'I shall make this phenomenon yield its secrets', while the Sufic attitude is: 'Let the real truth, whatever it may be, be revealed to me'.

"The former is the 'heroic' mode: attempting something with insufficient knowledge, the latter the 'self-evolution' mode: fitting oneself to perceive that which is to be perceived. It eliminates heroism."

Idries Shah. *The Commanding Self*

The Perennialist conception and practice of knowledge involves concentrating on self-evolvement, to attain the capability of discovering and comprehending progressively more of reality. Even some scientists recognize that what is needed in any era of thought is the development of *new ways of thinking about* elemental issues.

"In both celestial and terrestrial physics--which hold the strategic place in the whole movement--change is brought about, not by new observations or additional evidence in the first instance, but by transpositions that were taking place inside the minds of the scientists themselves. In this connection it is not irrelevant to note that, of all forms of mental activity, the most difficult to induce even in the minds of the young, who may be presumed not to have lost their flexibility, is the art of handling the same bundle of data as before, but placing them in a new system of relations with one another by giving them a different framework, all which virtually means putting on a different kind of thinking-cap for the moment."

Genuine scientists have developed the ability to re-think the most basic postulates of both Newtonian and Einsteinian science, including the concepts of matter, mathematics, and the basic "stuff" of reality.

**Self-Evolvement**

The Perennial Tradition uses special methodologies of investigation to examine physical entities and our ordinary states of consciousness, to discover supersensible aspects of human knowledge. Thus we're able to recognize that our ordinary experience involves more than naive realism assumes.
"There is experience not only of the sensible and the corporeal, but also of the spiritual and intellectual; not only of the physical, but also of the intelligible. For every true method of knowledge must undergo distinctions and differentiations within itself according to the fields of objects to which it relates. . . According to the being towards which it is directed, and according to the end in view, experience itself must undergo transformations and pass through a certain intellectual scale."  

By using special techniques of analyzing ordinary sense perception, we recognize that in our various modes of apperception, we do not experience "pure" sensory input without any mixture of thought involved.  

"Knowledge does not consist in impressions of sense, but in reasoning about them; in that only, and not in the mere impression, truth and being can be attained."

Plato, *Theaetus*

Perception is always permeated by Thought; there is never immediate apprehension of an unmediated reality. As we seek to understand Reality, we impose certain ordering principles on our sense data: causality, objectivity (seeing things as objects), space, time, etc. Contrary to naive realism, Reality is not easily knowable.

In attempting to gain a true awareness of Reality, we must work through distorting elements, both internal and external, and have the courage of our informed convictions once we gain a grasp of truth (for example, acknowledging what our opinion is regarding what's happening in the world).

Instead of focusing all our attention on the "object" of knowledge, the Perennial Tradition places primary attention on the "subject." If we are to apprehend Reality accurately and comprehensively, our internal elements must be in correct order. Much before we arrive at knowledge, we must examine all our predispositions, preconceptions, ways of thinking, and habits of reflection.

We have to begin by searching within ourselves to discover what we think we know about Reality but don't really know (ignorance of ignorance). When we discover that our impressions of Reality are inaccurate, we must correct them through thoughtful examination of evidence as to what really is the truth. We find that the media in today's world create delusions as to what's happening and that special interest groups disseminate propaganda (false information) to try to create in our minds a counterfeit picture of Reality.

Dogmatists--those who dictate what reality is, according to their own interests without examining or presenting evidence--are the actual and abiding enemies of truth. Dogmatists come in all stripes: fundamentalist followers of a religion, naive empiricists, scientific materialists, doctrinaire capitalists, diehard rationalists, doctrinaire socialists, and so on.
Throughout the Dark Ages, ecclesiastical and secular rulers had decreed what was the truth—and audacious indeed were the few brave souls, such as Galileo and Bruno, who dared to dissent. The Platonic tradition had been represented in succeeding centuries by courageous thinkers (such as Boethius and Bernard of Clairvaux) who understood how important it was to help humankind understand that truth is determined by Reason. This tradition emphasizes that we must cleanse our minds from the myths of "the cave"—the commonplace misreadings of sense experience.

This idea of self-analysis and self-purification was expressed in eloquent terms by Plotinus:

"Withdraw within yourself, and examine yourself. If you do not yet therein discover beauty, do as the artist, who cuts off, polishes, purifies until he has adorned his statue with all the marks of beauty. Remove from your soul, therefore, all that is superfluous, straighten out all that is crooked, purify and illuminate what is obscure, and do not cease from perfecting your statue until the divine resplendence of virtue shines forth upon your sight. . . . But if you try to fix on it an eye soiled by vice, an eye that is impure, or weak, so as not to be able to support the splendour of so brilliant an object, that eye will see nothing, but even if it were shown a sight easy to grasp."

Ennead I, "Of Beauty," Book VI, Chs. 8-9

The Cambridge Platonists were insistent that spiritual truth cannot be gained merely through dogma or doctrine, that it must be judged by human experience. Henry More expressed this idea in his *Enchiridion ethicum*, the principal ethical work of the Cambridge School:

"Every vital good is perceived and judged by life and sense. . . If you have ever been this, you have seen this."

You can only understand a reality if you have experienced it, if a part of your very being has participated in it. It may now be more apparent why we are focusing on self-evolvement in this chapter—because such experiential engagement is essential for true understanding. And it also should be clear why we are using the term "Reason" in its capitalized form: because naive reasoning cannot go beyond the ordinary dimensions of commonplace thought to the world of Higher Consciousness—the Self.

"If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is: Infinite."

William Blake

When we cleanse our "doors of perception" to attain a grasp of truth, when we work through credulous "realism" to an understanding of Reality, we come into contact with supersensible forces within us—we arrive at Reason. The Cambridge Platonists
changed the focus from the object to the subject, from sacrament and dogma to experiential participation and personal evolvement.

The reason for this shift is that we can only discern the reality we're capable of discerning; our mental and moral states determine how well we can understand Higher Reality. Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464 C.E.) had asserted that God is for every man what he perceives God to be, and that the form and quality of this perception depends on that of the individual.

One of the Cambridge Platonists, John Smith, maintained: "Such as Men themselves are, such will God himself seem to be." He was expressing Goethe's later sentiment: "Wie einer is, so is sein Gott." As a man is, so is his God.

Analyzing Experience to Discover Higher Consciousness

The Cambridge thinkers were true followers of the Platonic tradition in using the analysis of experience to discover eternal elements. Plato maintained that we could "recognize" objects only because we possessed the ability to use higher Forms to discern their instantiation in shoes and ships and sealing wax--even cabbages and kings.

"In all the writings of the Cambridge thinkers, it is not so much a matter of extending the religious horizon as of penetrating into another dimension of religious experience. Differences of doctrinal opinion are not only tolerated, but welcomed; for such freedom is the condition under which the pure essential core of religion can become manifest." 11

During the seventeenth century, the Cambridge Platonists had to contend against two major types of dogmatists: the Puritan reactionaries and the philosophical empiricists. Both these latter groups maintained that truth was easily determinable: by the dictates of those in power. Truth comes to us already formed, the empiricists maintained; we do not need to mix reason or thought into perceptual understanding. The Church dictates what is truth, said the ecclesiastical tyrants, and the believer does not need to worry his mind with such irrelevancies as evidence or proof.

The ecclesiastical and political dogmatists, said the Cambridge Platonists, simply did not understand human experience.

"The chief weakness of the empirical doctrine of knowledge is, according to Cudworth, that it starts from an analysis of sense-perception instead of from an analysis of judgment. Hobbes believes he is giving an account of sense-perception when he explains it as the mere reaction of the human body to an external stimulus. But even if simple perception admitted of such an explanation, nothing whatever would be gained towards the derivation of knowledge. For the beginning of all knowledge lies, not in perception as such, but in the judgment concerning it" 12

As we've seen, Plato--and his Cambridge disciples--maintained that no sense-object--for example, a triangle--can be recognized and defined, unless human reason is able to grasp the supersensible Form of triangle. For judgment to be possible, and with it the
beginning and seed of all knowledge, a sensible subject must always be connected with a supersensible concept, the particular with the general, and the perceived or imagined with the Real.

The Cambridge thinkers advocated a concept of experience which included both physical perception and spiritual discernment. If, as did the empiricists, one recognizes experience only in the form of sense-perception and considers it as valid only in this form, this excludes the spiritual as well as the intellectual elements which are clearly evident from any discerning analysis of human experience.

Analyzing Experience to Discover Higher Self-Consciousness

The English Platonists maintained that humans are capable of a form of "pure perception" which gives us access not only to the transcendent dimension, to the being and nature of the Deity, but also to our deepest immanent being. Through Reason we know not only the Divine but also our real Self.

"If perception were given only in the form of sensation, of an external impression affecting the senses, then all possibility of self-consciousness would cease to be. For what sense grasps and conceives is only the qualities of external things, not the character, states, and activities of one's own ego. We see and hear colours and sounds; we do not see seeing and hear hearing themselves. Even when, with respect to content, we remain within the limits of the sense world, knowledge of sensible things is never a cognitive act of the senses alone. An original and independent form of awareness (Gewahrwerden) operates here which has nothing in common, and is not to be confused, with that form of perception (Wahrnehmung) by which we stand in relationship to the corporeal world. Even the mere sense-impression, accordingly, in so far as it is not simply the corporeal impression, but the consciousness of this impression, contains a genuine and indispensable purely noetic element." 13

"How could our thinking insight sit in judgment on the declarations of the senses, unless there were something living within it which transcends sense-perception? Therefore the truth or falsity in things is decided by something within us which opposes the physical body and consequently not subject to its laws."

Rudolph Steiner, Christianity as Mystical Fact

The act of perception, the Cambridge thinkers maintained, reveals primarily not the properties of the external object being perceived, but discloses the potencies and nature of the perceiving subject. Our ability to apprehend Reality is in direct ratio to our essence: our powers of fair appraisal, our capability of allowing an object to disclose itself to us without our dictating to it what it must be. Every act of objective knowing is also an act of self-knowing; the result reveals who we are as much as what the object is. In this comprehensive understanding of human experience, the Cambridge Platonists were head
and shoulders above seventeenth century English empiricism, which had made a vain effort to resolve the knowing subject, the ego, into a mere "bundle of perceptions."

"The awe-inspired person does not want to get hold of or to possess what he reveres, with the aid of his intellectual concepts. He seeks only to get himself into the frame of mind appropriate to the revered object--one which renders him open to its summons and makes his vision clear for its beckonings. He knows: if he manages to comply with the phenomenon that is worthy of his awe so perfectly that he catches sight of its entire truth, he has succeeded also in releasing himself from the chaos of all delusions."

Medard Boss, *A Psychiatrist Discovers India*

As we develop ourselves--our awareness of ourselves and our world--we gain the ability to know more. It is not just a matter of getting in touch with more reality. We must improve ourselves--our mental and moral qualities--if we are to gain increased understanding of what we already are in touch with and new aspects of reality we discover with our enhanced capabilities.

Thought, as a higher organ, remains unnoticed in the ordinary conscious life; indeed there are many persons who deny its existence. But their denial is due to an incapacity to carry out genuine self-observation. There is something at work in Thought which is more than physical or terrestrial.

As we examine our experience, we learn to separate the element of sensation from the element of thought. Thought in itself has no connection to bodily sensation; in thought we are entirely separate from our body. In thought the human soul rises out of the bodily organism into a higher realm. As soon as a person becomes distinctly, separately conscious of the thought element in the act of perception, she knows by direct experience that she is acting as a living soul, quite independent of her bodily nature.

"Neoplatonism asserts consistently that the world as seen by the spiritual man is a very different world from that which is seen by the carnal man. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned; and the whole world, to him who can see it as it is, is irradiated by Spirit. A sober trust in religious experience, when that experience has been earned, is an essential factor in Platonic faith. Our vision is clarified by the conquest of fleshly lusts, by steady concentration of the thoughts, will, and affections on things that are good and true and lovely; by disinterestedness, which thinks of no reward, and by that progressive unification of our nature which in the Gospels is called the single eye.

Thought becomes deliberate as we develop the capabilities of critical thinking and critical consciousness. We not only sense and think, but we reflect and evaluate our experience, making judgements based on reason and morality.

As Plato taught, a person can definitely experience herself as a supersensible soul-being, as she develops an advanced capacity for self-observation. Plato outlined a kind of meditative practice, an intensified activity of Thought, activating in itself the force that is otherwise used in sense perception. Our Thinking in itself grows so strong that it works with the same vivid quality which is otherwise only there in sense-experience. We begin to discern the Forms, such as Goodness, Beauty, Justice, and Truth.

"The soul then reasons in the most beautiful manner, when it is disturbed by nothing belonging to the body, neither by hearing, nor sight, nor pain, nor any pleasure, but subsists in the most eminent degree, itself by itself, bidding farewell to the body, and, as much as possible neither communicating nor being in contact with it, extends itself towards real being."

Plato, Phaedo

This apperception of Forms is unrelated to memories from the physical past, sensory experiences in the immediate present, or contemplation of the future. The Platonic apperceptive experience in itself provides a content of its own, such as we otherwise only derive from sense-perception. As we develop this apperceptive meditative ability of the soul, we experience an inherent certainty that we're receiving no purely visionary content originating in our unconscious organic mind. We learn to experience realities which are called forth in higher consciousness without external perceptions, just as we are conscious of ideas in ordinary life when engaged in reflective thought, ideas independent of the physical world.

Plato taught that as we develop our evolving consciousness, a supersensible, purely spiritual content enters the feeling and perception of the Self. The apperceptive meditative life gives rise to a form of supersensible self-awareness. This self-consciousness can then be directed to the activity of the Will in realizing new capabilities—even to the point of moving beyond the realm of Forms to the One, as in Plotinus’ experience.

In every-day life the activity of the will is consciously directed to external actions. There is, however, a spiritual expression of Will to which we pay little conscious attention: the activity of Higher Will which carries us from one stage of development to another in the course of our life. For not only are we engaged with different conceptual content within our soul, day after day, but our soul-life itself, on each succeeding day, evolves out of our soul-life of the day before. The driving force in this evolving process is the Higher Will, which in this field of its activity remains for the most part unconscious.

Advanced self-awareness can, however, raise this element of Higher Will, with all its unusual powers, into our conscious life. When we accomplish this, we gain a perception of a
life of Will which has absolutely nothing to do with any elements of a sense-perceptible external world, but is directed solely to the inner evolution of the soul—independed of the physical world. We learn by degrees to enter into the living essence of our Higher Will, just as in the former kind of meditative life we entered into the Higher Consciousness. Our conscious, deliberate experience of this element of Higher Will expands into the experience of an independent supersensible external world of its own substance. Having gained the aspect of Will, our supersensible self-consciousness finds itself in a supersensible realm filled with spiritual Beings and events.

**Conclusion**

Modern "empirical science" has been created through a syncretism of positive and negative forces, resulting in a world of technological development, but personal devastation. It's necessary to regain an awareness of the essential forces of the Perennialist conception and practice of knowledge to create a world which supports genuine human development.

The arcane form of knowledge practiced by philosophers within the Perennial Tradition requires self-evolvement, making possible a supersensible form of awareness. Using this procedure of higher consciousness, the Perennialist realizes a transcendental domain.

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2 Idries Shah, *The Sufis*

3 Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science*

4 Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976), *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science* (first published in 1958) as follows:

... In the philosophy of Democritus the atoms are eternal and indestructible units of matter, they can never be transformed into each other. With regard to this question modern physics takes a definite stand against the materialism of Democritus and for Plato and the Pythagoreans. The elementary particles are certainly not eternal and indestructible units of matter, they can actually be transformed into each other. As a matter of fact, if two such particles, moving through space with a very high kinetic energy, collide, then many new elementary particles may be created from the available energy and the old particles may have disappeared in the collision. Such events have been frequently observed and offer the best proof that all particles are made of the same substance: energy. But the resemblance of the modern views to
those of Plato and the Pythagoreans can be carried somewhat further. The
elementary particles in Plato's *Timaeus* are finally not substance but mathematical
forms. 'All things are numbers' is a sentence attributed to Pythagoras. The only
mathematical forms available at that time were such geometric forms as the regular
solids or the triangles which form their surface. In modern quantum theory there
can be no doubt that the elementary particles will finally also be mathematical
forms but of a much more complicated nature."

5 Mathematical physicist, Sir Roger Penrose of Oxford University, made the following
comments during an interview with Science and Spirit magazine (March - April 2003
issue):

"I view the mathematical world as having an existence of its own, independent of us.
It is timeless. I think, to be a working mathematician, it's difficult to hold any other
view.

"It's not so much that the Platonic world has its own existence, but that the physical
world accords with such precision, subtlety, and sophistication with aspects of the
Platonic mathematical world. And this, of course, does go back to Plato, who was
clear in distinguishing between notions of precise mathematics and the usually
inexact ways in which one applies this mathematics to the physical world. It is the
shadow of the pure mathematical world that you see in the physical world. This idea
is central to the way we do science. Science is always exploring the way the world
works in relation to certain proposed models, and these models are mathematical
constructions."

6 Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington (an outstanding physicist): "To put the conclusion crudely-
-the stuff of the world is mind-stuff . . . and the substratum of everything is of mental
character . . . Consciousness is not sharply defined, but fades into subconsciousness; and
beyond that we must postulate something indefinite but yet continuous with our mental
nature. This I take to be the world-stuff."

7 Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, 1953

8 Apperception is not mere sensation; it is the ordering, arranging, and categorizing of
sensations to achieve knowledge. Reality, to be known, requires unifying intelligence to
constitute the relations of its phenomena, to make it a connected world of experience.

apperception is thus a general term for all mental processes in which reality comes into
connection with an already existent system of mental elements (concepts, feelings,
desires, etc.), and is thereby ordered, classified, explained or, in a word, understood.

9 I'm capitalizing the word "Reason" to distinguish it from naive rationalism or
commonplace reasoning, which accept assertions without examining whether or not they
are supported by evidence.

10 Those persons who were either a part of the Cambridge Platonist movement or were
supportive of it included: Benjamin Whichcote, Ralph Cudworth, John Colet, John Smith,
Henry More, Thomas More, Erasmus, Bayle, Shaftesbury, Hugo Grotius, and Leibnitz

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 The author's recently published book *The Perennial Tradition* explicates this secret legacy, the single stream of initiatory teaching flowing through all the great schools of philosophy and mysticism.
Chapter Six:  Platonism In Cathedral Philosophy and Art

In this chapter we'll examine the unique features of transformative poetry by exploring how these aspects were discovered and used by the Mystery School at Chartres in the twelfth century.

A careful study of transformative forces reveals that Gothic cathedrals such as Chartres are portals to a higher state of consciousness. The Chartres Mystery School taught the esoteric knowledge of how we can apprehend representations of sacred reality with our senses and our emotions in a special manner. The initiatory training of the Chartres School allowed initiates to experience a Cathedral (or other sacred place) as a reality on the threshold of the spiritual dimension through which we can gain access to an actual experience of higher reality.

"Chartrian thought, it can be said, begins and ends in a kind of poetry: poetic intuition is finally the only means of linking philosophy and theology, pagan auctores and Christian doctrine, sapientia and eloquenta."

Winthrop Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century*

The Chartrian Mystery School was part of the twelfth-century renaissance and its rediscovery of man and the natural world. In this new mind-set, natural objects were regarded as expressive of a higher essence operative in and through them. The universe was seen in terms of the cosmic eroticism of the hermetic tradition or the emanationism of Dionysius the Areopagite. Humans were again seen as the center of earthly creation, the hub of the intellectualized cosmos of a renascent Platonism. This was a revolutionary point of view, especially compared to the repressive, Augustinian conception of humans as fallen, depraved creatures whose only hope was self-abnegating submission to the Church.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153 CE) was the first of the great twelfth-century Teaching Masters associated with Chartres. In a manner similar to Boethius, Bernard reintroduced Platonism, revealing the mystical power of his teaching. Bernard and the other Teaching Masters in the Chartrian Mystery School encouraged the study of poetry as a revelation of a Higher dimension. Through a metaphorical reading of the sensible world, humans gain access to a higher realm. Poetry was seen as being in the service of philosophical wisdom.

A common motif in the Chartres Mystery School was the marriage of Mercury and Philology, Higher Intelligence and Eloquence, used by Martianus Capella to represent the divine harmony and cosmic scope of the Liberal Arts. For the Chartrian Masters this marriage theme symbolized the mind's higher power of attaining truth through universal knowledge. This was part of a larger theme of love, especially the love of Wisdom--the
essence of Philosophy. Wisdom was seen as deep understanding of the true nature of Reality, attainable only by one who seeks Wisdom with love. Only the lover of Wisdom—the true philosopher—is truly wise.

"Those who use fables for serious purposes do so because they realize that a frank, open exposition of herself is distasteful to Nature, who, just as she has withheld an understanding of herself from the uncouth senses of men by enveloping herself in variegated garments, has also desired to have her secrets handled by more prudent individuals through fabulous narratives. Accordingly, her sacred rites are veiled in mysterious representations so that she may not have to show herself even to initiates. Only eminent men of superior intelligence gain a revelation of her truth; the others must be drawn to venerate her by the agency of those figurai which protect her secrets from debasement."

Macrobius, (395-423 CE) Neoplatonic philosopher

Macrobius had declared that a certain respect for sacred things always leads true philosophers to employ poetic fables and myths when they discuss the inner realities of the sensible world or the powers which govern it.

Since only Plato's *Timaeus* was generally available at this time, the Chartrians used this poetic myth as a structure, a model of reality which could be "read" allegorically as a portal to philosophical understanding. Bernard and the other Masters saw the *Timaeus* as a poetic vision, and its terms, particularly the World Soul, as elements of poetic allegory.

One of the dominant currents in the Chartrian Mystery School was the use of poetic vision as a guide on the journey toward truth. Boethius, Martianus Capella, and the pseudo-Apuleius were all seen as heirs of Plato and outstanding examples of the mystical power of poetry. Poetry is viewed as a special capability of the philosophizing mind, and poetic intuitions lead us on our journey toward Wisdom.

Plato's *Timaeus* was interpreted as analogous, within the limits of poetic intuition and philosophical speculation, to the Christian vision of the inner, sacramental structure of the world. The authority the Chartrian Teaching Masters gave to Plato's cosmology became the foundation on which the study of all ancient literature was established.

One of the reasons the Chartrian Mystery School embraced poetry so openly may have been as a means of evading the murderous heresy-hunters in the Roman Catholic Church. Around 1180 CE, the poet Godfrey was censured and possibly exiled from St. Victor for writing a *Fons philosophiae* in the spirit of the *Didascalicon* of Hugh of Saint Victor. The *Didascalicon* presented a survey of all areas of knowledge and attempted to show that they were parts of a whole that was necessary for a man if he were to achieve his natural perfection and his heavenly destiny.
"Philosophy is a thorough investigation into the nature of all things, both human and divine."

Hugh of Saint Victor, *The Didascalicon*

Chartres, St. Victor, and other cathedral schools of the twelfth century, focused a large part of their attention on the role of poetry in the expression of complex ideas, and the complexities of meaning attainable in poetic language. One of their major texts was Boethius' *Consolations of Philosophy*, which gave definite expression to the metaphorical implications of the cosmology of the *Timaeus* and placed special emphasis on the psychological experience of the philosopher. In this major work, Philosophy teaches Boethius that attachment to earthly things is a form of imprisonment. Boethius' poem shows that poetry, inspired by love, suspends the working of necessity in the universe. Philosophy moves from persuasion and rational argument to an inspired use of poetry to bridge the gap between the situation of the dreamer and the divine harmony, denying the reality of the dreamer's loss as Orpheus seeks to deny the fact of the death of Eurydice.

We can get some idea of the cathedral schools' sense of the mystery within poetry by examining one major concept taught by such cathedral school masters as Guillaume of Conches (1090-1154 CE), Bernard Sylvestris (1085-1178 CE) and John of Salisbury (1115-1180 CE). The concept *ingenium* was of crucial importance to later medieval literature, because among its many meanings, *ingenium* connotes that faculty of imagination by virtue of which poets receive inspiration for their poems. In his *Metalogicon* John of Salisbury outlines a most subtle description of *ingenium* as capable of both sensual and philosophical apprehension; man, basically mortal and rational, can become immortal by pursuing wisdom, or irrational when drawn by vice to emulate the beasts.

Guillaume of Conches defined *ingenium* as "that mental power which perceives things immediately." *Ingenium* is nonrational insight into similarities; it is a practical knowing, an intuition that exists apart from the formal reasoning process. One view of this ability to make connections through immediate cognition suggests that *ingenium* allows us to "see" through the poetic word, to make connections in experience we have not before made and which we need in order to think new thoughts. *Ingenium* helps humans define and order various interpretations and create a new reality. *Ingenium* as a power of language serves to name and assign meanings to objects in the world, and through this process of creating names, humans create a separate reality apart from the ordinary world.

Another of the major works revered by the cathedral schools was Martianus' *Marriage of Mercury and Philology*.

"It was largely from Martianus that the Chartrian poets learned their subtly evocative use of mythology, and that carefully ambiguous 'metaphysical' style which seems always to say more than can be extracted from it by rational analysis.

"The eloquence presented by Martianus in the figure of Mercury is clearly an almost mystical conception, a link between the divine mind and human
comprehension, and so, in conjunction with knowledge, a means whereby the human soul may realize its situation and destiny. It is a visionary medium, and in its ideal form—as characterized by Jove in the hymn... it reveals a certain affinity between Martianus' Neoplatonism and the pseudo-Dionysian notion of anagogy, the means whereby human perception transcends itself. And despite Martianus' thick veneer of literary embellishment we may see in the 'immortalizing' influence of Mercury and Philology something like the effect described by Hugh of St. Victor in the opening book of the *Didascalicon*, the human soul's recovery, through knowledge, of its likeness to the divine Wisdom." 8

"Now are the Arts blest, for together you so sanctify them that they grant access to heaven, open the stellar regions to mortal beings, and let faithful prayers ascend even to the bright ether. Through your observation and articulation, understanding fills the expanses of the mind. Through you well-tempered language attains eternal honor."

The speech of Thalia, Muse of elegy, in Martianus, *Marriage of Mercury and Philology*

Following the theme of the Platonic quest for wisdom in a higher realm, the *Marriage of Mercury and Philology* dramatizes the theme of intellectual pilgrimage from the sensible world to the higher world of vision and union with the Divine. "The love of truth," Martianus says," is intimately related to, even innate in human reason, and invokes wholeheartedly that truth which exists only by virtue of powers beyond existence." The ultimate Truth does not manifest itself unless divine discernment, through the outpouring of grace, enters and illumines the mind of the philosopher who seeks and loves wisdom.

"Neither the intelligence, the imagination nor the ear are the true or at least the deepest or highest recipients of the poetic delight, even as they are not its true or highest creators; they are only its channels and instruments: the true creator, the true hearer is the soul. The more rapidly and transparently the rest do their work of transmission, the less they make of their separate claim to satisfaction, the more directly the word reaches and sinks deep into the soul, the greater the poetry. Therefore poetry has not really done its work, at least its highest work, until it has raised the pleasure of the instrument and transmuted it into the deeper delight of the soul. A divine Ananda, a delight interpretative, creative, revealing, formative,—one might almost say, an inverse reflection of the joy which the universal Soul felt in its great release of energy when it rang out into the rhythmic forms of the universe the spiritual truth, the large interpretative idea, the life, the power, the emotion of things packed into an original creative vision,—such spiritual joy is that which the soul of the poet feels and which, when he can conquer the human difficulties of his task, he succeeds in pouring also into all those who are prepared to receive it. This delight is not merely a godlike pastime; it is a great formative and illuminative power."
"This power [of dharmasya] makes the rhythmic word of the poet the highest form of speech available to man for the expression whether of his self-vision or of his world-vision. It is noticeable that even the deepest experience, the pure spiritual which enters into things that can never be wholly expressed, still, when it does try to express them and not merely to explain them intellectually, tends instinctively to use, often the rhythmic forms, almost always the manner of speech characteristic of poetry. But poetry attempts to extend this manner of vision and utterance to all experience, even the most objective, and therefore it has a natural urge towards the expression of something in the object beyond its mere appearances, even when these seem outwardly to be all that it is enjoying.

"Ordinary speech uses language mostly for a limited practical utility of communication; it uses it for life and for the expression of ideas and feelings necessary or useful to life. In doing so, we treat words as conventional signs for ideas with nothing but a perfunctory attention to their natural force, much as we use any kind of common machine or simple implement; we treat them as if, though useful for life, they were themselves without life. When we wish to put a more vital power into them, we have to lend it to them out of ourselves, by marked intonations of the voice, by the emotional force or vital energy we throw into the sound so as to infuse into the conventional word-sign something which is not inherent in itself. But if we go back earlier in the history of language and still more if we look into its origins, we shall, I think, find that it was not always so with human speech. Words had not only a real and vivid life of their own, but the speaker was more conscious of it than we can possibly be with our mechanised and sophisticated intellects. This arose from the primitive nature of language which, probably, in its first movement was not intended, or shall we say, did not intend, so much to stand for distinct ideas of the intelligence as for feelings, sensations, broad indefinite mental impressions with minute shades of quality in them which we do not now care to pursue. The intellectual sense in its precision must have been a secondary element which grew more dominant as language evolved along with the evolving intelligence.

"Now, poetry goes back in a way and recovers, though in another fashion, as much as it can of this original element. It does this partly by a stress on the image replacing the old sensational concreteness, partly by a greater attention to the suggestive force of the sound, its life, its power, the mental impression it carries. It associates this with the definitive thought value contributed by the intelligence and increases both by each other. In that way it succeeds at the same time in carrying up the power of speech to the direct expression of a higher reach of experience than the intellectual or vital. For it brings out not only the definitive intellectual value of the word, not only its power of emotion and sensation, its vital suggestion, but through and beyond these aids its soul-suggestion, its spirit. So poetry arrives at the indication of infinite meanings beyond the finite intellectual meaning the word carries. It expresses not only the life-soul of man as did the primitive word, not only the ideas of his intelligence for which speech now usually serves, but the experience, the vision, the ideas, as we may say, of the higher and wider soul in
him. Making them real to our life-soul as well as present to our intellect, it opens to us by the word the doors of the Spirit." 2

1 Winthrop Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century*

2 Sri Aurobindo, "The Essence of Poetry"
Chapter Seven: Plato’s Mystical Science of Dialectic

Plato's esoteric teachings in his written dialogues are hidden in plain sight. However, discerning their meaning requires proficiency in a special tradition. As we saw in an earlier chapter, Plato's teaching about the esoteric nature of philosophy is plainly referred to in his *Phaedo*:

"For I deem that the true disciple of philosophy is likely to be misunderstood by other men; they do not perceive that he is ever pursuing death and dying . . . the separation of soul and body . . . when the soul lives in herself, and is parted from the body. . . ."

"In matters of this sort philosophers, above all other men, may be observed in every sort of way to dissever the soul from the body."

Here Plato is referring to the teaching concerning "dying before you die" which is one of the central concepts of the Perennial Tradition. Philosophy, the love of and the search for wisdom, is the actual practice of learning to leave the physical body and live in the soul, the spiritual body.

The philosopher--seeker after wisdom--lives in her soul, the higher consciousness. Discerning the essence of philosophy, we now have important clues as to the nature of Plato's mystical science of Dialectic--what he called *maieutic psychagogy*:

- maieutic: *maieûtikos*, midwife, one who assists in the delivery of a new being

- psychagogy: *psuchagôgê*, from Greek, psûchê, soul, and *agogê*, transport to or lead out of; the science of helping to bring out (give birth to) new elements (ideas, beings) from a person's soul or to bring into (transmit to) a person's soul, elements from a higher level of being.

Plato's Socrates, in the dialogues, practiced an extraordinary kind of *shared mystical experience* in which he served as a psychagogic midwife, overseeing the process of the divulgence of, the bringing into being of new elements: ideas, feelings, inspirations, and images.

"The new order [created by Socrates' life and death] is understood secretly even by those who meet it with sulkiness and recalcitrance, for this secret understanding binds the partners of the dialogue together at least for its duration. We remember the passage of the *Cratylus*. The 'desire for virtue' is present even if
it is obscured by the mania of the body; and it will reign freely when the obstacle of the body is removed. In so far as the dialogue is an attempt at existential communication, it is an attempt to liberate the soul from its passions, to denude it of its body. Socrates speaks to his interlocutors as if they were 'dead' souls, or at least, as if they were souls who are capable of death. On the part of Socrates, the dialogue is an attempt to submit the others, at least tentatively, to the catharsis of death. The judgment of the dead is thus enacted in part in the dialogue itself, concretely, in the attempt of Socrates to pierce through the 'body' of his interlocutors to their naked souls. He tries to make die, and thereby to make live, those who threaten him with death."

Eric Voegelin, *Plato*

Both Socrates and the other participants in the dialogues achieved an altered state of consciousness. Socrates at times had to work to bring other participants into a heightened state, since they were largely unfamiliar with the experience. But his presence and his actions were able to bring them into this higher state--so much so that the participants sometimes spoke of being entranced, charmed, or bewitched.

"Menon: You seem to me to be a veritable wizard, casting your spells over me, and I am truly getting bewitched and enchanted, and you have stopped my world And if I may venture to make a jest about you, you seem to me both in your appearance and in your power over others to be very like the flat torpedo fish [electric eel], who torpifies those who come near him and touch him, as you have now stopped my world. . . . And I think that you are very wise in not venturing away from home, for if you performed your necromancy in other places as you do in Athens, you would be cast into prison as a sorcerer."

Meno

As is clear from the *Phaedo* and other dialogues, Plato believed that we can only discover truth when we are in our higher consciousness.

"Then when does the soul attain truth?-for in attempting to consider anything in company with the ordinary bodily consciousness she is obviously deceived.
"Yes, that is true.

"Must it not, then, be by contemplating in our soul, if at all, that any of the things that possess true being become known to it?

"And surely the soul then contemplates best when none of these things disturb it--neither hearing, nor sight, nor pain, nor pleasure of any kind; but it retires as much as possible within itself, taking leave of the body; and, so far as it can, not communicating or being in contact with it, it aims at the discovery of that which has true being." ²
Such statements as this—occurring throughout Plato's dialogues—should make it clear to us that the search for truth cannot take place in the ordinary bodily consciousness. Yet academics and scholastics throughout history have ignored Plato's declaration and thoughtlessly gone ahead to assume that what Plato was describing in the dialogues was merely two or more people, in their ordinary state of consciousness, conversing about philosophical concepts.

If we're to take Plato at his word, dialectical interchange involves the participants attempting to gain a genuine understanding of "that which has true being"—eternal Forms. Since Plato makes it clear that eternal Forms cannot be discovered or understood in the ordinary mind-state, dialectical interchange can occur only when the participants are in a heightened mode of consciousness.

Plato makes this very clear in the *Phaedo*:

"Is there or is there not an absolute justice?"
"Assuredly there is."
"And an absolute beauty and absolute good?"
"Of course."
"But did you ever behold any of them with your eyes?"
"Certainly not."
"Or did you ever reach them with any other bodily sense? (and I speak not of these alone, but of absolute greatness, and health, and strength, and of the essence or true nature of everything). Has the reality of them ever been perceived by you through the bodily organs? or rather, is not the nearest approach to the knowledge of their several natures made by him who so orders his intellectual vision as to have the most exact conception of the essence of that which he considers?"

Socrates is making it clear to them that they have had experience with Forms when in dialectical interchange with him, and since they could not have experienced Forms in their ordinary state of consciousness, it must have been in a higher state (even if they were unaware of it and in a limited way) through Higher Reasoning.

"Certainly."
"And he attains to the knowledge of Forms in their highest purity who goes to each of them with the soul alone, not allowing when in the act of contemplation the intrusion or introduction of sight or any other sense in the company of reason, but with the very light of the soul in her clearness penetrates into the very light of truth in each Form; is not this the sort of man who, if ever man did, is likely to attain the knowledge of true being?"

"Dialectic is the only philosophical process which seeks for wisdom by (anagogically) uplifting our Intellectual foundations so that our Higher Self ascends to the Origin."

*
The Mystical Dialectic

We can identify other essential features of the Socratic shared mystical experience which Plato called Dialectic or maieutic psychagogy.

1. In the experience itself, participants were aware that they were in a state of heightened consciousness: inspiration or divine rapture.

"And now, dear Phaedrus, I shall pause for an instant to ask whether you do not think me, as I appear to myself, inspired?"
Phaedrus: Yes, Socrates, you seem to have a very unusual flow of words."
Socrates: Listen to me, then, in silence; for surely the place is holy; so that you must not wonder, if, as I proceed, I appear to be in a divine fervor, for already I am getting into inspired poetry."

We must be aware that Socrates is speaking somewhat ironically. But he is also speaking of the reality of a heightened state of consciousness which participants experience in Dialectic.

2. Maieutic psychagogy involves Socrates (or other advanced teacher) helping another participant to give birth to realities from within him. Plato believed that the human soul possesses latent knowledge, which could be brought out and elucidated by a special kind of interchange which he called Dialectic—a bringing to birth from the depths of a person’s higher being. The maieutic art of Plato’s Socrates involved his drawing his interlocutors into stating and reflecting upon the implications of their uncritically held opinions and their joint examination of these opinions to see if they were stillborn or viable.

"Indeed, the secret of your system has just this instant dawned upon me. I comprehend the principle you use in communicating your questions. You lead me through the field of my own knowledge, and then by pointing out analogies to what I know, help me understand that I really know some realities which hitherto, as I believed, I had no knowledge of."

Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*

3. In the shared mystical experience of Dialectic, Socrates acted as a spiritual midwife, assisting the other person to bring his own ideas into being, as we see in *Theatetus:*

"You are not bearing in mind, my friend, that I have no knowledge; I cannot claim any such ideas as my own? no, I am barren as far as they are concerned. But I am acting as your midwife, and that is why I am chanting and serving up morsels of my own wisdom for you to taste. This will continue until I have played my part in bringing your very own notion out into the world. Once that stage is over, I will examine the idea to see whether it turns out to be viable or stillborn."
"And so with dialectic; when a person starts on the discovery of the absolute by the light of reason only, and without any assistance of sense, and perseveres until by pure intelligence he arrives at the perception of the absolute good, he at last finds himself at the end of the intellectual world, as in the case of sight at the end of the visible."

Plato, *The Commonwealth*

4. In the shared mystical experience of maieutic psychagogy, Socrates, Plato, or an equally advanced dialectician plants idea-seeds in other participants' souls and then watches as they come to fruition.

SOCRATES: Is there not another kind of word or speech far better than this, and having far greater power -- a son of the same family, but lawfully begotten?
PHAEDRUS: Whom do you mean, and what is his origin?
SOCRATES: I mean an intelligent word graven in the soul of the learner, which can defend itself, and knows when to speak and when to be silent.
PHAEDRUS: You mean the living word of knowledge which has a soul, and of which the written word is properly no more than an image?
SOCRATES: But nobler far is the serious pursuit of the dialectician, who, finding a congenial soul, by the help of science sows and plants therein words which are able to help themselves and him who planted them, and are not unfruitful, but have in them a seed which others brought up in different soils render immortal, making the possessors of it happy to the utmost extent of human happiness.

Plato, *Phaedrus*

5. Plato's explanation of the nature of maieutic psychagogy in his *Seventh Letter* makes it clear that Dialectic is a mystical experience.

"After much effort, as names, definitions, sights, and other data of sense, are brought into contact and friction one with another, in the course of scrutiny and kindly testing by men who proceed by question and answer without ill will, with a sudden flash there shines forth understanding about every problem, and an intelligence whose efforts reach the furthest limits of human powers. . . . After long continued interchange between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of understanding, suddenly a light is kindled in the teacher's soul by a flame that leaps to the student's soul, and thereafter sustains itself." 341c

The mystical aspect of Dialectic is evidenced by the sudden flash that shines forth, the light that is kindled in one soul which leaps to another and then sustains itself. As a Master--such as Socrates or Plato--creates the dialectical atmosphere and brings his inner wisdom to bear on the shared mystical experience, a literal enlightenment takes place. Such
an experience cannot be contrived by merely trying to set up a "debate" or a "philosophical conversation." There must be a real magician—a genuine philosopher—present to bring about the flash of intuitive illumination eventuating in attunement with true reality, the "activation of the subtleties."

"To read a Platonic Dialogue is to participate in a dramatic experience, and what readers cull from these experiences and refer to as The Philosophy of Plato can never be stated in the indicative mood, as if it were so much objective information on matters of fact. Plato's 'secret' is not factual at all. No application of scholarly technique enables the reader to extract from The Dialogues a concentrate which can be distilled into a specific essence. Plato's 'philosophy' has no prescriptive formula. There is nothing, nothing whatever, which you might conceivably discover, write down, and pass around in a printed book which could be set upon library shelves and put into the hands of young students. It is like poetry or music. You have to experience it directly, in and for yourself."

Rupert C. Lodge, The Philosophy of Plato, 1956

6. Given the nature of the spiritual birth process in Dialectic, only a prepared student can effectively participate. Plato makes this clear in his Seventh Letter:

"The process however of dealing with all of these, as the mind moves up and down to each in turn, does after much effort give birth in a well-constituted mind to knowledge of that which is well constituted. But if a man is ill-constituted by nature (as the state of the soul is naturally in the majority both in its capacity for learning and in what is called moral character)—or it may have become so by deterioration—not even Lynceus could endow such men with the power of sight"

7. The mystical experience of maieutic psychagogy involves the participants in a process which teaches how to develop and take part in the process; it involves learning by doing. Socrates and Plato taught how the mystical Dialectic can be entered into, how it can be carried out (allowing higher knowledge to flow through oneself), and how to continue this process in one's life. Something occurred within the dialectical experience which remained with those who were prepared to take up the philosophical-mystical life.

"Let us review the whole development of this dialogue [Phaedo], in which Socrates brings his hearers to behold the eternal in human personality. The hearers accept his thoughts, and they look into themselves to see if they can find in their inner experiences something which assents to his ideas. They make the objections which strike them. What has happened to the hearers when the dialogue is finished? They have found something within them which they did not possess before. They have not merely accepted an abstract truth, but they have gone through a development. Something has come to life in them which was not living in them before. Is not this
to be compared with an initiation? And does not this throw light on the reason for Plato's setting forth his philosophy in the form of conversation? These dialogues are nothing else than the literary form of the events which took place in the sanctuaries of the Mysteries. We are convinced of this from what Plato himself says in many passages. Plato wished to be, as a philosophical teacher, what the initiator into the Mysteries was, as far as this was compatible with the philosophical manner of communication. It is evident how Plato feels himself in harmony with the Mysteries! He only thinks he is on the right path when it is taking him where the Mystic is to be led."

Rudolph Steiner, *Christianity as Mystical Fact*

**Why Dialectic Cannot Be Written**

There are a vast number of other fascinating and challenging aspects of the phenomenon of maieutic psychagogy--Dialectic--and serious students will find that the clues within this chapter will enable them to study Plato's writings in a new light. One of the interesting issues which these insights into Dialectic help to clear up is Plato's insistence that he could not put his mystic science into written form.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato states that the philosopher does not put into writing the things "which are of greatest value." He confirmed this idea in his *Seventh Letter*. Through what we have been able to discern of the essence of Dialectic, Plato's statements become clear. Dialectic is an *interpersonal activity* in which the leader and participants enter a higher state of consciousness, allowing psychic material to flow through them. They fly by the seat of their pants; they do not follow a script. In this dialectical drama, they write their own lines as they go. They gain union with their Higher Self and create new understanding by the interaction and coalescence of ideas from all active participants in the interchange.

Hence, a person could certainly write a *description or a record* of this phenomenon of maieutic psychagogy--as Plato did in his dialogues. But it's factually impossible to *write* a spiritual experience; this is something which can only be *lived*.

"The subject on which Plato had not written and would never write, must be something about which all writing would be futile. It must be a feeling, a sentiment, an experience, which is not gained by instantaneous communication, but by making oneself one with it, in heart and soul. The reference is to the inner education which Plato was able to give those he selected."

Rudolph Steiner, *Christianity as Mystical Fact*
In the Seventh Letter, Plato says clearly, "I certainly have composed no work in regard to [dialectic], nor shall I ever do so in the future, for there is no way of putting it in words like other studies."

He then elaborates:

"Thus much at least, I can say about all writers, past or future, who say they know the things to which I devote myself, whether by hearing the teaching of me or of others, or by their own discoveries—that according to my view it is not possible for them to have any real skill in the matter. There neither is nor ever will be a treatise of mine on the subject. For it does not admit of exposition like other branches of knowledge.

"Yet this much I know—that if the things were written or put into words, it would be done best by me, and that, if they were written badly, I should be the person most pained. Again, if they had appeared to me to admit adequately of writing and exposition, what task in life could I have performed nobler than this, to write what is of great service to mankind and to bring the nature of things into the light for all to see?

Plato here indicates that the special experience of higher knowledge CANNOT be transmitted through writing.

"But I do not think it a good thing for men that there should be a disquisition, as it is called, on this topic—except for some few, who are able with a little teaching to find it out for themselves.

There are a few people, Plato indicates, who can take a small amount of delineation of higher knowledge in written form and figure out the rest for themselves.

"As for the rest, it would fill some of them quite illogically with a mistaken feeling of contempt, and others with lofty and vain-glorious expectations, as though they had learnt something high and mighty.

Most people, Plato says, would inspect any expression of Dialectic in written form and either feel it to be inferior or consider it to be something already within their impressive store of knowledge.
"Further, on account of the weakness of language, these [i.e., the four: the name, the definition, the image, and the knowledge] attempt to show what each thing is like, not less than what each thing is. For this reason no man of intelligence will venture to express his philosophical views in language, especially not in language that is unchangeable, which is true of that which is set down in written characters."

Here Plato indicates that the experience of Higher Knowledge cannot be expressed or encapsulated in a fixed form; that it is a living, organic interchange which evolves and requires that the Seeker evolve with it.

"Therefore every man of worth, when dealing with matters of worth, will be far from exposing them to ill feeling and misunderstanding among men by committing them to writing. In one word, then, it may be known from this that, if one sees written treatises composed by anyone, either the laws of a lawgiver, or in any other form whatever, these are not for that man the things of most worth, if he is a man of worth, but that his treasures are laid up in the fairest spot that he possesses. But if these things were worked at by him as things of real worth, and committed to writing, then surely, not gods, but men 'have themselves bereft him of his wits.'"

Plato believed that the experiential interchange of which Dialectic consists—including the recollection of previously unknown ideas within oneself—is a creative process which produces genuine knowledge. The "word graven in the soul" of the participant in Dialectic is the only kind of authentic writing having to do with the process of Dialectic.

However, even though the process of Dialectic cannot be written—since it must be experienced—the results, the record of dialectical interchanges can be recorded in written form. That is precisely what Plato's dialogues are: written chronicles of prior dialogical experiences containing important knowledge acquired through Dialectic.

Some scholastics and academics have completely misconstrued Plato's statements concerning writing, assuming that he means that nothing of any importance can be recorded in a written form. What he was saying—on the contrary—was that the process of maieutic psychagogy, Dialectic—cannot be transmitted through writing, since it requires that a person actually experience the dynamically unfolding procedure.

Plato would not have written his dialogues and letters had he believed that writing could not transmit something of value. It was just that writing cannot convey the essential process—Dialectic—through which genuine knowledge is initially divulged.

"Plato succeeds in stimulating, in all of us, a way of looking at—whatever we are studying. He makes us perceptive: in a specific way. We call it 'intuitive'. Throwing our minds open to Platonic influence enables us to look beyond what is objectively
present: present, that is, to our senses and to our analytical intelligence. We feel our way toward its 'inner essence', toward what would be its meaning 'in an ideal case'. We call this, looking for the 'Platonic idea' of the object."

Rupert C. Lodge, *The Philosophy of Plato*, 1956

**Dialectic Involves a Primordial, Directer Language**

Platonic Dialectic involves an intuitive mode of apprehension and communication, defining intuition as immediate apprehension or cognition, the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference. In the dialogues, we frequently find Socrates encouraging the other participants to speak what comes to them intuitively, without editing their ideas through rational reflection. He was aware that Dialectic involves the primordial, directer "language" of intuitive apperception. This is part of the reason why Plato stated that Dialectic could not be put into written form which has passed through intellectual reflection.

In the ordinary state of consciousness, intellectual expression of ideas in words always follows limpingly behind the fleeting meanings we wish to express and which thoughts and words can never fully embody or signify. Verbal expressions of thought can only fix glimpses and shadows of the original ideas. The things they can set down to examine are already shells from which life has all but flown. That is why an expression in words is always lacking in the vital principle; why it fixes merely a thing that has ceased to move. An idea that is living always moves, and can itself be embodied only in a thing that is similarly fluid and alive—an interpersonal interchange.

The language we must use—to write, speak, or conceive—in seeking understanding of higher realities—is made up, not of words, but of those moving, ever-changing things known as actions—doings. Mere intellectual formulations of living ideas are only useful when we later wish to analyze them. In true Dialectic or in spiritual meditation and contemplation, we act through inspiration. Inspired action is the instantaneous and directest expression of that which, when unperverted by false habits of mediating thought, comes to us directly from primal sources. Our inspirations are then undiluted by passage through the fixed and stationary medium of thought—and reasoned words—by which reflective wisdom is formulated. Participants in Dialectic engage not in reflective, verbal deliberation, but in expressing immediate inspiration from the Source.

Immediate inspiration is the language we speak and understand; a fluid, flowing language, ever-changing, ever moving in company with the ideas that it expresses. That is why in Dialectic—and other forms of meditation and contemplation—we look, not to formulated belief for evidence of achievement, but to the living, moving force within us, which brings instantaneous illumination.

Reflective thought—expressed in considered words—is an arrestation, a fixing of a dead thing, while the living thing wings its way out of sight. Immediate inspiration is an
expression of what we experience, which we may not intellectually comprehend at the moment. In Dialectic, meditation, and contemplation we free ourselves temporarily from the intellectual mechanism and engage in the language of immediate action—intuiting, allowing a free flow of ideas, speaking extemporaneously, inter-acting spontaneously, not-thinking. This kind of unrehearsed, unedited "doing" is the elemental mode of interaction and communication between persons and other realities. It is similar to the experience of not merely saying "I love you," but loving through action.

In nature we have two useful examples of instant translation into action of direct impulse: a group of birds flocking, and a school of fish swarming. We often seen a dense mass of birds such as sandpipers or pigeons wheeling, turning, changing direction in close formation, with the speed and precision of perfect coordination. The hesitation of a tenth of a second by any single member would inevitably throw the whole operation into jostling confusion.

There is manifestly no room for the communication of an idea through any medium of expression, no matter how simple or instantaneous, through a mechanism such as a brain. The action of flocking or swarming must of itself be the reality. It is not a question of receiving an impulse and deciding to act on it; nor of receiving an impulse and diverting it into the groove of even long-established habit of thought or behavior. Such automatic action is necessarily the immediate external manifestation of an impulse.

The rapid twinklings of birds flocking through space are phrases of the directer language of which Dialectic speaks. This uninterrupted, primordial language is what Socrates taught the participants through dialectical interchange. At first, we may feel it to be almost impossible to obtain that flexibility of spirit which will receive accurately and undistortedly the immediate impulse from the depths of being—the impulse which will translate itself into the sure action that is its expression. We stammer and hesitate and use wrong "words" and "awkward phrases" in attempting any new or little-accustomed language.

When we begin learning to follow intuition in immediate dialectical interchange, we make many blunders and mistakes. This occurs for several reasons: because of the distortion of habits of thought, puzzlement as to what we're experiencing, or because before the first and pure impulse is brought to conscious attention, it's diluted by deliberation. Thought, for all its mechanical nature, is extraordinarily swift, and before the flash of perception has reached awareness it may unconsciously interpose a hundred considerations that modify it. What we think is the pure impulse has thus become a hybrid before it reaches its expression in action. Only with practice and with trial-and-error can fluency and accuracy in this language of Dialectic, as in all others, be obtained. But we can succeed in gaining proficiency in this primordial language of inspiration through persistence of effort.

The spontaneity of Dialectic is not, however, mere mindless blathering, bantering, or Freudian free-association of senseless mental effluence. We're learning to use the unfamiliar powers of intuition and inspiration, tapping into content already existent in a
higher realm. Dialectic involves allowing this supersensible wisdom to flow through us in an untrammeled and unpremeditated way. Instead of the uprush of crude, raw discharge, we become unobstructed conduits for exalted, resplendent ideas and feelings.

**We Can Only Investigate Human Nature Through the Use of Dialectic**

Whereas we can study the nature of ordinary physical objects through the use of science and mathematics, the essence of humans is not ascertainable through those means. In his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Pico della Mirandola makes it clear just what a different kind of reality humankind is:

"We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom and choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have power to degenerate into the lower forms of life which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgement, to be reborn into the highest forms, which are divine."

Because we humans are of a dual nature—earthly and divine—ordinary procedures of investigation do not enable us to understand human persons. The methodology of exploration must partake of the same nature as that of the reality explored.

"We cannot discover the nature of man in the same way that we can detect the nature of physical things. Physical things may be described in terms of their objective properties, but man may be described and defined only in terms of his consciousness. This fact poses an entirely new problem which cannot be solved by our usual modes of investigation. Empirical observation and logical analysis, in the sense in which these terms were used in pre-Socratic philosophy, here proved inefficient and inadequate.

“For it is only in our immediate intercourse with human beings that we have insight into the character of man. We must actually confront man, we must meet him squarely face to face, in order to understand him. Hence it is not a new objective content, but a new activity and function of thought which is the distinctive feature of the philosophy of Socrates. Philosophy, which had hitherto been conceived as an intellectual monologue, is transformed into a dialogue. Only by way of dialogical or dialectic thought can we approach the knowledge of human nature. Previously truth might have been conceived to be a sort of ready-made thing which could be grasped by an effort of the individual thinker, and readily transferred and communicated to others. But Socrates could no longer subscribe to this view. It is as impossible—says Plato in the Republic—to implant truth in the soul of a man as it is to give the power of seeing to a man born blind. Truth is by nature the offspring of dialectic thought. It cannot be gained, therefore, except through a constant cooperation of the subjects in mutual interrogation and reply. It is not therefore like an empirical object; it must be understood as the outgrowth of a social act. Here we have the new, indirect answer to the question 'What is
man?' Man is declared to be that creature who is constantly in search of himself—a creature who in every moment of his existence must examine and scrutinize the conditions of his existence. In this scrutiny, in this critical attitude toward human life, consists the real value of human life."

Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*

**Dialectic Is Not Indoctrination**

Many pedants have mistakenly interpreted Plato's dialogues as instructional or indoctrinating devices, imposing ideas on student-participants. They have mindlessly co-opted dialogue as an educational instrument through which to impose ideas on learners. The original Latin word, *educere*, means to draw out, which is one of the connotations of Dialectic. But education has now largely devolved into nothing but training: conditioning hapless students into following selected ideas and behaviors.

Plato knew that Dialectic would be misconstrued as indoctrination, so in some of his dialogues he has Socrates making clear that he is not trying to impose pre-conceived ideas on the participants. Maieutic psychagogy is the shared experience of seekers in discovering new understanding through an extemporaneous interchange of ideas and evaluations.

A superficial reading of Plato's dialogues encourages the "learned" scholar to suppose that Socrates' claim that he was ignorant was merely a ploy, a pretence, nothing but word-play. Scholastics refuse to take seriously what Socrates himself said: that he possessed only the knowledge that he did not know, that he had only the advantage of being aware of his own ignorance. Socrates was sincere in saying that he did not begin a dialogue with an agenda.

Socrates quite honestly believed that he was ignorant, because he was seeking not just knowledge but wisdom: what things really are, what are their true relationships, their true value, and living in harmony with this wisdom. In the infinite realm of wisdom, it would be preposterous to think that one had ever reached the terminus point. A true seeker of wisdom reminds himself constantly that at an earlier stage he had assumed that he knew things of which he was actually ignorant. Also, he had assumed that he had reached the limit of what he could understand. He can expect a repetition of those experiences throughout his life—if he follows the path of philosophy. Each person, at whatever level of understanding he may be, must vanquish his own ignorance as he ascends the pathway to wisdom.

We can experience Plato's dialogues as noetic dramatizations of dialectical interactions which hold in suspension the question of the validity or invalidity of the various points of view, while allowing us to feel the full force of the explorations. The dialogues allow us to see that philosophy, for Plato and Socrates, was not a body of true or false doctrines, of sound or unsound arguments. Philosophy, Plato makes clear, is not the power, rhetorical or logical, to win arguments or to make the weaker case appear the
stronger, which it was for the Sophists such as Zeno and Protagoras. We can experience dialogue as a means of learning to philosophize dialectically and as meditation exercises on essential philosophic themes.

Practicing genuine Dialectic requires that there be at least one person at an advanced level within the Perennial Tradition, and prepared participants willing and able to actively engage in the experience to the fullest extent. Such dialogues require that each participant speak openly and honestly, holding nothing back out of fear of contradiction or personal criticism. A person cannot participate in a true dialogue if he tries to plan his tactics ("I'll hold back on this argument until the end of the debate. . ."), hedge his bets ("I dare not say that, because they would criticize me for such a weak argument. . ."), or seek to defeat an opponent ("His argument on this point is so weak; I'll hit him with this overwhelming fact. . .").

The participants within a true dialogue reside in a higher Intellectual dimension. The power of genuine Dialectic occurs because all persons are fully and honestly invested in what they're saying and seeking. Their divergent contributions vigorously collide, then coalesce in a higher united understanding--even if it's an understanding that they don't understand. Each participant must, like Zorba dancing, "undo his belt" and surrender to a higher sway, allowing the free flow of the give-and-take of the dialogue to lead whither it will. The most fruitful dialogues of this nature are those in which more than one participant is an advanced teacher.

**Inner Dialectic**

The Greek word dialectic (dialektos) refers to reciprocal interchange between persons or aspects of a person. One of the extraordinary elements Plato introduces is locating Dialectic both in outer discourse and in inner dialogue.

In *Theatetus*, Plato defines thinking as:

"a talk which the soul has with itself about the objects under its consideration. . . It seems to me that the soul when it thinks is simply carrying on a discussion in which it asks itself questions and answers them itself, affirms and denies. And when it arrives at something definite, either by a gradual process or a sudden leap, when it affirms one thing consistently and without divided counsel, we call this its judgment. So, in my view, to judge is to make a statement, and a judgment is a statement which is not addressed to another person or spoken aloud, but silently addressed to oneself." [189e-190a]

In the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger states that thinking and discourse are the same thing, except that what we call thinking is, precisely, the inward dialogue carried on by the mind with itself without spoken sound. (263e) He also asserts that there is true and false speech, that thinking is the soul's conversation with itself, that belief is the conclusion of thinking, and that what we call appearing is the blending of perception and belief. [264b]
Thinking as Inner Dialectic

According to Plato, conceiving or thinking is the conversation the soul has with itself in considering things, asking itself questions and answering them. It is possible to practice Dialectic as an inner dialogue with one's soul.

Plato's written dialogues are dramatic representations of "outer dialectic," to help us learn how to create an "inner dialectic" indispensable for attaining wisdom. The Greek concept of dialogue (dialogos), is composed of the word logos meaning communication or divulgence and dia which means "through"--not "two." A dialogue, then, can be among any number of people, not just two, and a single person can experience dialogue within herself.

Dialogue is conversation focused on specific issues or questions, engaged in deliberately with the goal of increasing understanding, investigating issues, and examining thoughts and actions. Dialogue engages the heart as well as the mind. It is not merely ordinary, everyday conversation; it has a focus and a purpose. Dialogue differs from debate, in which two points of view vie with each other to prove the correctness or superiority of one viewpoint over the other. Real dialogue presupposes an openness on the part of the participants to modify deeply held beliefs. In a true dialogue, whenever a false belief is discovered on the part of any one person, everybody gains increased understanding. Participants in Dialectic do not play a game against each other, but investigate crucial issues with one another in a joint effort to attain knowledge.

Plato's written dialogues not only record specific inquiries into philosophical problems but also instruct us in the dialectical process. The dialogues are object-lessons, living models of the dialectical method. They exemplify how participants in Dialectic learn through directed interchange of ideas. This allows persons learning to engage in philosophical Dialectic to continue the process of discovery beyond the actual presence of the written dialogue. Plato's method of presenting written dialogues is instruction in a way of life (agôgê) for the budding philosopher, and not merely the acquisition of specific knowledge. The written dialogues lead the seeker, but at the same time allow her to internalize the dialectical process; they allow self-discovery and assimilation of the process of philosophic inquiry. The process of Dialectic thus becomes habitual and Dialectic is then used in forming well-founded beliefs and acting in principled ways.

The Contemporary Operation of Plato's Mystical Science

Perennialist teachers--such as Plato--adapt higher knowledge to their own time and place and to the capabilities of the people with whom they're dealing. In Plato's time--and until very recently--written engagement in Dialectic was impossible.

Part of the difficulty with written expressions of Dialectic, during Plato's time, was that they could "neither speak for themselves nor teach the truth adequately to others."
Written expositions couldn't interact with the reader. During Plato's era, it was correct to say (as he does in *Phaedrus*):

"Only in principles of justice and goodness and nobility taught and communicated orally for the sake of instruction and graven in the soul, which is the true way of writing, is there clearness and perfection and seriousness."

However, Plato was aware that even in his day writing possessed the hypomnematic function of bringing essential concepts to mind for those who were already prepared and possessed basic knowledge.

With the introduction of the Internet, the nature of written expression of ideas has undergone a revolutionary transformation. The Perennialist Teacher and the seeker can interact in a real-time environment, exchanging ideas and evaluations in synchronous or asynchronous mode.

As is the case in all genuine learning environments, only those students who have the necessary moral and intellectual capabilities are able to pursue the path of knowledge in all its manifestations and achieve understanding of higher consciousness. Of equal importance, only an adept in the Perennial Tradition can initiate genuine Dialectic, since only she possesses the requisite capabilities to make it operative in its higher mode. In the last stage of Dialectic, the Teacher and the seeker must come into physical contact to complete the process.

The New Dialectic is focused interchange, engaged in intentionally with the goal of increasing understanding, exploring issues, and evaluating thoughts or actions. The author has engaged in psychagogic Dialectic throughout a period of over forty years and is now working with the New Dialectic personally and through the Internet. This unique, innovative process has proven to be effective and productive in all aspects.

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* Anagogical: from the Greek *anagein*; to lift up, the word denotes any element (entity or experience) through which a person's actions, thoughts and feelings are lifted up from worldly sense experience to realize an experiential participation in the spiritual realm

1 See the author's recently published book, *The Perennial Tradition*

2 I am using the translations of Thomas Taylor, Benjamin Jowett, Henry Cary, Paul Shorey, G. M. A. Grube, and my own rendering of Plato's dialogues from the original Greek, to arrive at what I consider to be the essence of Plato's thought

3 Dialectic: three translations from a passage in *The Commonwealth VII*, 533d
"Dialectic is the only philosophical process which seeks for wisdom by (anagogically) uplifting our Intellectual foundations so that our Higher Self ascends to the Origin." my translation

"'Then,' said I, 'is not dialectics the only process of inquiry that advances in this manner, doing away with hypotheses, up to the first principle itself in order to find confirmation there?" translated by Paul Shorey

"Then dialectic, and dialectic alone, goes directly to the first principle and is the only science which does away with hypotheses in order to make her ground secure; the eye of the soul, which is literally buried in an outlandish slough, is by her gentle aid lifted upward. . ." translation by Benjamin Jowett

"Dialectic is the only philosophical process which seeks for wisdom by (anagogically) uplifting our Intellectual foundations so that our Higher Self ascends to the Origin." Author’s translation

4 An author able to achieve union with her Higher Consciousness is capable of communicating (speaking and writing) in a manner to transmit primordial meanings to another person. The usual limitations of words and thoughts are overcome and a higher language with (literally) higher meanings comes into play.

5 Zorba: "Life is trouble. Only death is not. To be alive is to undo your belt and look for trouble."

6 The author experiences the most transformative Dialectic (maieutic psychagogy) in free-flowing interchange with his wife, Michelle Mairesse.
Chapter Eight: Contemporary Distortions of Platonic Dialectic

Persons who work within the Perennial Tradition avoid criticism of other thinkers unless it becomes necessary and appropriate. The growing number of distortions of Plato's mystical science of dialectic makes it essential to refute and expose these deformed concepts, in the interest of helping serious students gain a genuine understanding of the essence of Plato's dialectic.

Scholastic Distortions of Platonic Dialectic

The modern era of Platonic scholarship began with Friedrich Schleiermacher's 1804 German translation of Plato's dialogues. Schleiermacher maintained:

- The content of Plato's philosophy is completely contained in the written dialogues
- Plato's philosophy is systematic, i.e., it constitutes a system of doctrines

Following Schleiermacher, most scholarly studies on Plato and Plato's philosophy have been responses to one or both of his theses. Some interpreters, for example, have denied that Plato's philosophy is systematic and doctrinal, but fail to give us an alternative model by which to understand this philosophy.

A recent "esotericist" interpretation of Plato's philosophy originated with the "Tubingen School" scholars H. J. Kramer and K. Gaiser. They assert that Plato's is a systematic philosophy, but believe that the dialogues do not provide a full exposition of Plato's philosophical system. According to this view, there are "unwritten doctrines" that are even more important than those contained in the dialogues. Plato communicated such doctrines only orally within the Academy, they believe, and we know of them only through the reports of other philosophers (particularly Aristotle).

As we get into the details of Plato's concept of Dialectic, we find different interpretations of *elenchus*, the process of a cleansing examination which Socrates used when engaging in a dialogue with others. Gregory Vlastos asserts that *elenchus* is actually capable of establishing philosophical propositions (though without absolute certainty), while other scholars hold that elenchus has only the negative aim of purging the interlocutors of the conceit of wisdom.

Richard Robinson's 1953 book, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, treats Dialectic as a purely formal, logical method of constructing arguments. Robinson defines Dialectic in total abstraction from the content of Plato's philosophy. Dialectic, understood as the mere exchange of questions and answers, becomes an accidental feature of Plato's philosophy, without real purpose. Robinson can only explain Plato's use of Dialectic as "due in general to the fondness of ancient Athenians for discussion." Discrediting Dialectic as mere
formation of arguments, Robinson asserts that the dialogues produce no genuine knowledge and are therefore inferior to science.

The Malformation of the Concept of Platonic Dialectic

The word "Dialectic" has become tattered by careless use, frayed out into numerous rags of connotation. We'll freshen the word so that it's no longer just an empty clamshell standing for things which aren't there. The concept of Dialectic has been spread thin to cover too many aspects, each of which really should have a word of its own. We'll retread the term Dialectic because it's become a very skiddy concept.

At present, many uses of the term have little or no connection to actual experience, referring merely to inane schemas or metaphysical abstractions such as "Hegelian dialectic," "Marxist dialectic," or the myriad insipid phrases such as "the dialectical tension between history and purpose."

The concept of Platonic Dialectic has been vitiated by such self-appointed experts as Theodor Adorno, J.N. Findlay, and Eric Voegelin, to name only a few. The following impenetrable misinterpretation of the concept of dialectic provides a clear example:

"Dialectics, the epitome of negative knowledge, will have nothing beside it; even a negative dialectics drags along the commandment of exclusiveness from the positive one, from the system. Such reasoning would require a non-dialectical consciousness to be negated as finite and fallible. In all its historical forms, dialectics prohibited stepping out of it . . . Although dialectics allows us to think the absolute, the absolute as transmitted by dialectics remains in bondage to conditioned thinking."

Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 1969

The plethora of distortions of Plato's dialectic is so vast, that the misinterpretations are, for some people, driving out the correct interpretations, as in Gresham's Law.

We now have absurdities such as Art Collecting as a Dialectic Vocation. A whole subsection of the Internet reveals various pseudo-gurus programming their gullible disciple-victims through counterfeit "dialogues."

- "Dialogues" between a self-appointed Master and his disciples
- Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber engaging in pseudo-dialogues

And even art and music are now said to mysteriously contain "dialectical" aspects. At the Yale Center for British Art, Thomas C. Duffy, Professor of Music, conducted the premiere of his composition based on J.M.W. Turner's 1832 painting, Fingal's Cave. Duffy described the painting as presenting the dialectic between sacred and secular, light and darkness. "This music is constructed to reflect that dialectic," he said.
Defining Dialectic

We can get a clear idea of how complex and enigmatic Plato's Dialectic is by examining several scholastic attempts to fathom its essence. We'll inspect a self-assumed Plato expert's effort to understand Dialectic to see how academic philosophy's common tools of conjecture and presumption fail to achieve the least notion of the essence of this challenging Platonic concept. We can sometimes get a clearer idea of what something is by examining what it is not.

In an essay entitled "Dialectic as a Mystical Discipline," Kent Peacock has this to say about Plato's teachings:

"Now, the obvious question which strikes the beginner, when he first hears of this notion of dialectic, is, how can mere conversation or debate lead to certain knowledge of the transcendental patterns after which the world is fashioned? It would be very unusual, to say the least, to expect such a remarkable conclusion to any familiar sort of dialectic, such as might, for instance, occur in this seminar room. In fact, it is rare that a philosophical debate (as opposed to a monologue) comes to any sort of conclusion at all. For instance, we have before us as models the early Socratic dialogues, in which the debaters are left suspended in a state of aporia, or uncertainty. And yet Plato tells us that dialectic is the special technique or method which brings the potential philosopher to the state of enlightenment which guarantees his authority and enables him to govern the City."

Yes, it would be unusual--ludicrous in fact--to expect "mere conversation or debate" to lead to understanding of Forms, as Plato says is possible with Dialectic. But, as we've seen, it's clear that Dialectic possesses an entirely different essence than conversation, debate, cross-examination, or any other ordinary kind of interchange. Dialectic involves participants moving into an altered state of consciousness; not the ordinary mind-set found in classroom discussion or debate.

"For if the power of this dialectic is so great, and the end of this path is so mighty, it is not proper to confound doxastic arguments, with a method of this kind . . . "The doxastic method of reasoning has for its end the apparent, but the dialectic method endeavors to arrive at the One itself, always employing for this purpose steps of ascent, and at last, beautifully ends in the nature of the good."

Proclus (411-485 CE), The Theology of Plato

Peacock's foundering demonstrates that Plato's Dialectic is a phenomenon which can only be understood by persons who have experienced it. Peacock is forced, through lack of operative understanding of Dialectic, to make wild conjectures as to its true nature. He opines that it might be something like the Zen Buddhist practice of meditating on a koan, "a little story or puzzle whose meaning the student is asked to resolve, but which is
hopelessly, almost fiendishly paradoxical. A well-known example is the demand to 'Tell me what is the sound of one hand clapping.'"

Peacock speculates that Dialectic and Zen koan contemplation are similar in "that enlightenment is achieved by deliberately forcing one's attention on an unresolvable paradox."

"The difference in method between Zen and Plato is that Plato uses interminable discussion to bring the student's mind to the necessary state, while the Buddhists use meditation. I think the Buddhist would argue that meditation is a much more effective means for achieving the end of enlightenment that he seeks. (Of course, interaction with the teacher is also a vital part of the process in Zen.) Zen Buddhism has the benefit of over two thousand years of practice in something that I think Plato was just beginning to get a glimmering of how to use."

Peacock, having never experienced either the supposed "enlightenment" of Zen koan contemplation or the true mystical state of Platonic Dialectic, can only presume that

". . . the human mind has the peculiar ability that if it is deliberately and intensely focussed on a problematic situation for a long enough time, it can sometimes suddenly achieve a sudden resolution of the problem . . . My suggestion, which could only be supported by a thorough study of the historical literature, is that Plato or his followers became fascinated by the power of this faculty and decided to pursue it, using the medium of intense debate. This, I think, was the point of the process of dialectic; it was conversation designed to induce a burst of enlightenment, probably by focusing on an aporetic situation . . .

"I do not pretend to be certain of what this means . . . I rather doubt that Plato himself ever experienced this hypothetical supreme state of enlightenment that would enable one to see the Form of the Good directly. This is evidenced by the way in which Socrates introduces his description of the phenomenon, as if he were describing an aspiration, not an attainment. However, I do think that dialectic was practiced as a mystical discipline in the Academy, and that Plato undoubtedly achieved some sort of impressive, though perhaps inexpressible, illumination. Whatever he achieved was enough to excite his imagination and make him believe, or hope, that if dialectic were practiced well enough it would bring perception of the ultimate first principle, which he was sure must exist."

A scholastic "Plato scholar" such as Peacock affects humility by saying that he doesn't pretend to be certain of what Plato means by Dialectic, then immediately expounds the veriest nonsense as if he totally comprehended the essence of this mystical phenomenon. The upshot of Peacock's conjectures about Plato's thought is his preposterous conclusion that "Zen is philosophically more sophisticated than Plato."

If you don't bother to study Plato's thought with the level of diligence, reflection, and participation it requires--what Proclus termed "the arduous sublimities of this
contemplation"—you wind up with this kind of misrepresentation of Plato in general and Dialectic in particular.

Peacock and other academics of the same ilk are unaware that the mystical science of Platonic dialectic has been practiced by Perennialist teachers ever since the time of Socrates. Proclus, for example, did not merely theorize about Platonic dialectic, he used it in his private life alone and with his associates and students. Boethius practiced inner dialectic and chose to write his *Emboldenment of Philosophy* in the dialogue form.

Discussing Proclus' use of Platonic dialectic, this scholastic is unable to understand the dynamic of dialectic in the life of advanced thinkers.

"For Proclus Plato was the first scientific philosopher and it is only in Plato's writings that the scientific exposition of truth is to be found . . . Elaborating an approach inspired, it appears, in some respects by his teacher Syrianus, Proclus conceived of dialectic very much after the pattern of the structure of geometry as he understood it: dialectic is a demonstrative science, explicating certain a priori metaphysical truths given in the soul. These truths are more profound and general than geometrical axioms, concerning as they do the first principles of all reality, the gods."  

Those who study Platonic thought in a serious and honest manner come to recognize that it is vastly superior to ordinary sophistry or contemporary “philosophy.”

"It is easy to collect its [Platonic philosophy's] pre-eminence to all other philosophies; to show that where they oppose it, they are erroneous; that so far as they contain any thing scientific they are allied to it; and that at best they are but rivulets derived from this vast ocean of truth."

Thomas Taylor, "Introduction to the Philosophy and Writings of Plato"

**Earlier Distortion of Platonic Dialectic**

The distortion, misinterpretation, and perversion of Plato's conception of Dialectic by his successors began even during his life and have continued ever since, ending with the deliberate mangling of Plato's thought by such pseudo-scholars as Karl Popper, Leo Strauss, and their reactionary neo-con disciples.

It's interesting to note that Aristotle, a student in Plato's Academy, completely missed the true meaning of Dialectic. In his Seventh Letter, Plato made it clear that only specially qualified and attuned students can be selected to be initiated into this esoteric phenomenon. Clearly, Plato was not able to include Aristotle, which speaks volumes about Aristotle's deficiencies.
Aristotle's misunderstanding of Platonic Dialectic resulted in his statement: "The dialectic is merely critical where philosophy claims to know." To Plato the Dialectic was the path to understanding of the Forms. Aristotle believed that philosophy was the ultimate and Dialectic was merely a path of right reason, a method of sound rational thinking. With Aristotle, Dialectic became merely a methodology of logic.

Aristotle not only distorted Platonic Dialectic, but other fundamental elements of Plato's philosophy such as the concept of Forms. Unfortunately, many of the early pseudo-Christian scholastics, such as Augustine and Aquinas, used Aristotle as a foundation for their theological dogmas, while de-emphasizing or ignoring Plato's thought. Aristotle's philosophical and cosmological malformations were major factors in the horrendous debasement of human life that we call the Dark Ages.

Following Aristotle, the Stoics made of Dialectic a merely formal discipline within logic. The Stoics divided logic into grammar and dialectic. From then on, through the Middle Ages, the term dialectic became synonymous with formal logic. This view was the basis of the seven liberal arts which for centuries constituted the intellectual studies believed to be requisite for an educated person. Grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic (formal logic) made up the Trivium. Arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music made up the Quadrivium.

We can see how far understanding of Dialectic devolved with Aristotle and the Stoics, but interpretation of this elemental phenomenon was to undergo even more fatal distortions and misinterpretations. Kant believed that logic contained two aspects: general logic and particular logic, with general logic containing analytic and dialectic logic. Kant, working from nothing but his own uninformed conjectures, believed that general analytical logic was valid, at least as a method for disproving assertions. But general dialectical logic he declared was "an organon," a logic of illusion.

"Now general logic in its assumed character of organon, is called dialectic. Different as are the signification in which the ancients used this term for a science or an art, we may safely infer, from their actual employment of it, that with them it was nothing else than a logic of illusion a sophistical art for giving ignorance the coloring of truth, in which the thoroughness of procedure which logic requires was imitated, and their topic employed to cloak the empty pretensions."

Immanuel Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason

Immanuel Kant's pathetic attempt to vilify Plato as a metaphysical charlatan is actually an indictment of Kant. In his totally incoherent jargon, Kant claimed that Plato attempts to "prove the existence of a priori notions that make synthetic statements possible through reference to perceptions that have their sources not in human understanding but in the primordial ground (Urgrund) of all things."

Kant accuses Plato of creating these "perceptions" out of thin air, mere subjective feelings. Plato's effort, Kant claimed, involves a "mystical illumination," which brands him
as having fallen into Schwarmerei (the enthusiasm of philosophical imposters) that is "the death of all philosophy." Thus for Kant, Plato was the charlatan par excellence—nothing more.

Accepting Kant's assessment that dialectical reasoning led to contradictions, Hegel nonetheless rejected the assumption that it was therefore an illusion. Instead, he contrived a completely theoretical schema in which the contradictions involved in Kantian dialectic became the true form of reality. Hegel believed that his newly hatched artifice turned the world upside down. He considered his brand of "dialectic" to be a new form of metaphysical reason, a "higher consciousness," a "new way of thinking," "an elevation of the mind" based on utter rejection of the old-fashioned laws of thought and earlier outmoded philosophy.

Hegel believed he was initiating an even more profound revolution than Aristotle by revealing to the world what he thought was the Higher Logic of dialectic.

"The fact that it has been necessary to make a completely fresh start with this science [of dialectic], the very nature of the subject matter and the absence of any previous works which might have been utilized for the projected reconstruction of logic, may be taken into account by fair-minded critics, even though a labor covering many years has been unable to give this effort a greater perfection. The essential point of view is that what is involved is an altogether new concept of scientific procedure."

Hegel, The Science of Logic

As with all metaphysical charlatans, Hegel claimed that his "new system" could not be stated in common sense terms or validly deduced conclusions. He asserted that his method involved grasping "opposites in their unity, the positive in the negative" He alleged that his conception of dialectic was "a movement of truth in spirit" and as such could not be defined or stated in propositions, only to be grasped in its whole and not summarized. To any contemporary Hegelian true believer, any attempt to explain the Hegelian dialectical method distorts it. Hegelian disciples take on the fantasy-thinking of their Master, as we see in the neo-con madness stalking the modern world.

Accepting Hegel's dogma that contradiction is the elemental moving principle of the world, Karl Marx claimed to have turned Hegel's whole system on its head, maintaining that the Hegelian movement of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis could be used to explain—and predict the course of human history. Thus was born the preposterous nonsense termed dialectical materialism.

Contemporary Distortions of Platonic Dialectic

One of the more recent failed attempts to understand Dialectic was carried out by the physicist David Bohm (1917-1992). He tried to discern the essence of group interchange, writing a book (On Dialogue) and organizing dialogue groups. Unfortunately,
Bohm and those associated with him, were unable to understand the underlying dynamic of Platonic Dialectic, so their efforts came to naught. Failing to realize that he would have to undertake an in-depth study of Plato's dialogues in order to comprehend the profound phenomenon Dialectic, Bohm arrived at such errors as this:

"The dialogue is not aimed at settling anything. We explore meaning together—the creative perception of meaning—thinking together and feeling together. But meaning is active. It is not merely sitting there. The consideration of this meaning may act—or it may not. The whole point of having the Dialogue is that we're not trying to produce a result. That's very important. It may never do it. Or it may do it at some moment when we least expect it. The seed has been planted. And the meaning is naturally, spontaneously active and transformative."

David Bohm, "On Meaning, Purpose and Exploration in Dialogue"

Persons such as Bohm assume we can merely get a group of people together, let them founder, and something worthwhile will result.

"On the surface, dialogue is a relatively straightforward activity. A group of fifteen to forty people (Bohm's suggestions regarding numbers varied) voluntarily convene in a circle. After some initial clarification as to the nature of the process, the group is faced with how to proceed. As the group has convened with no preset agenda, settling into an agreeable topic (or topics) may take some time, and generate some frustration. In these early stages, a facilitator is useful, but the facilitator role should be relinquished as quickly as possible, leaving the group to chart its own course. Experience has shown that if such a group continues to meet regularly, social conventions begin to wear thin, and the content of sub-cultural differences begins to assert itself, regardless of the topic du jour. This emergent friction between contrasting values is at the heart of dialogue, in that it allows the participants to notice the assumptions that are active in the group, including one's own personal assumptions. Recognizing the power of these assumptions and attending to their 'virus-like' nature may lead to a new understanding of the fragmentary and self-destructive nature of many of our thought processes. With such understanding, defensive posturing can diminish, and a quality of natural warmth and fellowship can infuse the group."

Lee Nichol, Foreword to Bohm, On Dialogue, 1996

"This was the Socratic method, the dialectic, maieutic (maieutikos) method: to lead the mind, by attractiveness, to self-discovery . . . Socratic dialectic is used to determine and to pursue human excellence."

David Fortunoff, "Dialogue, Dialectic, and Maieutic: Plato's Dialogues As Educational Models"
Platonic Dialectic has been disfigured and misinterpreted by malformed concepts to the point that standard dictionaries now define Dialectic in these distortive terms (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2000):

- The art or practice of arriving at the truth by the exchange of logical arguments
- The process especially associated with Hegel of arriving at the truth by stating a thesis, developing a contradictory antithesis, and combining and resolving them into a coherent synthesis

In this and most other dictionaries, Plato is not even mentioned in defining "dialectic."

Our difficulty in comprehending Dialectic comes in part from our Western conception of how we apprehend Reality is articulated in terms of knowledge: "the body of truth, information, and principles acquired by mankind." Our comprehension of the world is thought to be involved with external objects and eventuate in information, facts, and data. For example, we assume that if we comprehend Plato's teachings then we will arrive inevitably at a system of doctrines which he expounded. This body of ideas and concepts can then be taught as a series of propositions which a student could memorize and then be said to have full comprehension of Platonism.

"... To put it bluntly, philosophy meant to Plato not a doctrine, still less a metaphysical system. He was fully aware of the obvious truth that final results are beyond man, and therefore not to be looked for in philosophy. Hence he can only find scorn for all those who vindicate for themselves an infallible authority and the right to speak and teach, as it were, ex cathedra. Such arrogant and overbearing behaviour is, in his eyes, quite irreconcilable with the character of a genuine philosopher. For in his opinion philosophy is essentially nothing but a sincere love of truth, and a relentless striving after it, as far as this is compatible with our mortal frames; and the only true philosopher is he, who, as a humble seeker after truth, does not presume 'to have apprehended' already, but is always 'reaching forth unto those things which are before.'"

Hermann Gauss, Plato's Conception of Philosophy, 1974

Dialectic, Plato makes it clear, is not science: the form of thought which eventuates in data, hypotheses, concepts, and doctrines--knowledge. Plato's dialogues do not expound dogmas or a preconceived system of thought, they are expositions of the dialectical process for the purpose of teaching the participants--Socrates' interlocutors and modern readers--how to carry out transformative interchange. Philosophers engage in Dialectic to attain understanding, not knowledge. Understanding is a process, an art, and a skill. Knowledge is fixed content, information, and data. Dialectical philosophy is a way of life, not a memorization of doctrines.
"For it will now appear that the highest end of philosophy is no more to be sought in mere knowledge, but rather in wisdom, that is, in the great art of seeing things in their due proportion, and according to their true values, and of acting in harmony with this understanding. And philosophy itself must no longer be considered to be primarily an intellectual pursuit, but rather becomes, as it has already been hinted at, a walk of life, based, as it seems, on the momentous decision to try at all times and in all circumstances to find out what is the best state for things to be in, and then to live so as to help to bring about that state."


This is not to say that Plato's dialogues are merely dramatic representations of the process of dialectical interchange, containing no information about what Socrates and Plato believed and practiced. In reading Plato's dialogues we must interpret what is being said and done so we come away with an understanding of Plato's ideas and methodologies— as well as participatory involvement in the dramatic events.

In emphasizing the dramatic element of Plato's dialogues, scholars such as Gerald A. Press, Victorino Tejera, and James. A. Arieti go to the extreme in seeing the conceptual content of the dialogues as subordinate to the element of drama.

Plato's dialogues constitute both expressions of his ideas and methodologies and dramatic presentations of Dialectical events. Contrary to Press and Tejera, the dialogues can be and should be read from both these points of view. If we're to understand Plato's dialogues, we must interpret them both in terms of what is said and what is done, both in terms of what Plato is teaching and how Plato is using the dramatic form to teach.

**Authentic Contemporary Use of Platonic Dialectic**

Perennialist groups utilize the dynamic of Platonic Dialectic in working toward specific outcomes: transformation, enlightenment, and understanding of important issues, concepts, and procedures. With the introduction of the Internet, the nature of written expression of ideas has undergone a revolutionary transformation. The Perennialist Teacher and the seeker can interact in a real-time environment, exchanging ideas and investigating issues in synchronous or asynchronous mode. This new procedure is termed the New Dialectic and is now being used in study programs related to the Perennial Tradition.

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1 Kent Peacock: Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

2 Dominic J. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity*
Given the nature of the spiritual birth process in dialectic, only a prepared student can effectively participate. Plato makes this clear in his Seventh Letter:

"But it is the methodical study [343e] of all these stages, passing in turn from one to another, up and down, which with difficulty implants knowledge, when the man himself, like his object, is of a fine nature; but if his nature is bad--and, in fact, the condition of most men's souls in respect of learning and of what are termed [344a] “morals” is either naturally bad or else corrupted,--then not even Lynceus [An Argonaut--an adventurer engaged in a quest--noted for his keenness of sight; here, by a playful hyperbole, he is supposed to be also a producer of sight in others; cf. Aristoph. Plut. 210] himself could make such folk see. In one word, neither receptivity nor memory will ever produce knowledge in him who has no affinity with the object, since it does not germinate to start with in alien states of mind; consequently neither those who have no natural connection or affinity with things just, and all else that is fair, although they are both receptive and retentive in various ways of other things, nor yet those who possess such affinity but are unreceptive and unretentive--none, I say, of these will ever learn to the utmost possible extent [344b] the truth of virtue nor yet of vice. For in learning these objects it is necessary to learn at the same time both what is false and what is true of the whole of Existence, and that through the most diligent and prolonged investigation, as I said at the commencement; and it is by means of the examination of each of these objects, comparing one with another--names and definitions, visions and sense-perceptions, --proving them by kindly proofs and employing dialectic that is void of envy--it is by such means, and hardly so, that there bursts out the light of intelligence and reason regarding each object in the mind of him who uses every effort of which mankind is capable." [translation by R.G. Bury]


Chapter Nine:  What and How Plato's Dialogues Teach Us

In chapter seven, we saw that in Plato's dialogues Socrates practiced an extraordinary kind of shared mystical experience in which he served as a psychagogic midwife, overseeing the process of the divulgence of, the bringing into being of, new elements: ideas, feelings, inspirations, understandings, and images.

This process, known as Dialectic (maieutic psychagogy), is an interpersonal activity in which the leader and participants enter a higher state of consciousness, allowing psychic material to flow through them.

They fly by the seat of their pants, not following a script. They gain union with their Higher Self and create new understanding by the interaction and coalescence of ideas from all active participants in the interchange.

At the beginning of a dialectic process, none of the participants "knows" consciously "the answer or answers." The "answer" or "solution" or "hypothesis" is a joint creation or discovery or invention produced in the process.

Dialectic is a process of bringing to birth realities, ideas, and images we do not know are within us or which come into being in the process--like a cake, which did not exist as a cake before the process of mixing, cooking, and baking took place.

Dialectic is joint inspiration, the sharing and mixing of intuitions to produce a new understanding. It is a discovery of something you have only a vague intimation of at the beginning. The special process used in dialectic--called elenchus--\(^1\) is a unique kind of ritual in the sense of a process evoking spiritual presence or power or knowledge.

What Is Plato Doing In His Dialogues?

As Dialectic was extraordinary shared mystical experiences, orchestrated by Socrates, we can expect the written record of these events to contain exceptional--and veiled--features.

We often misread the dialogues as though they were merely ordinary conversations, arguments, or debates, and from that perspective Socrates can appear to engage in useless logic-chopping, definition-searching, and cross-examining of the other participants.

When we begin to comprehend the subtlety and profundity of Plato's thought in general, we learn to expect that his dialogues would have been constructed with the utmost
care in conveying recondite meanings. Once we understand what is actually going on in Plato's dialogues—what and how he is teaching us—every discrete element in the dialectical interchange is seen to have a specific meaning and purpose.

To understand Plato's dialogues, we'll need to shift mental gears in several different ways. We must see that the essence of Plato's philosophy was an ongoing battle against exactly the same kind of twisted, unreal, counterfeit world that we presently face in the twenty-first century. Philosophy—the search for wisdom and truth—arises out of the resistance of the soul to its destruction by a perverted world. The situation Plato faced—and we now face—is the life-or-death of our very being. Secondly, we must approach the dialogues as "situational learning" phenomena.

"This new technique of teaching and learning presents situations which provide the student a certain form of experience that can assist in our self-transformation. Of course the situations do not possess a mechanistic magic; they cannot change us automatically. We must use them in order to explore and transform ourselves. At the same time, however, the form of experience the situations provide can begin to affect us in ways which we may not at first recognize. As we participate in the situational learning experiences, we may find ourselves changing in ways which our old categories and feelings cannot explain."

Norman D. Livergood, "Situational Learning" 3

We must avoid plunging heedlessly into a dialogue, assuming that a superficial reading of the words will provide insight. Approaching each dialogue with a necessary sense of respect and anticipation, it's necessary to study carefully how Plato created his dialogues to encourage specific transformative responses in the reader.

Plato thoughtfully selected specific details of character, behavior, wording, sequence, interaction, and implication. The structure of Plato's dialogues indicates their genius: we gain an understanding of fundamental concepts by bringing into dialectical juxtaposition the best ideas of the false world and the best ideas of the world of truth.

In this chapter, we'll examine in detail two specific dialogues—the Laches and the Meno—to illustrate the important elements involved in what Plato's dialogues teach us and how they teach us. Passages quoted from Plato’s Laches and Meno are the author’s translations. 4

Laches or Courage

We begin our study of the Laches by scrutinizing its name and its cast of characters. We're studying the virtue named courage. The seven persons present on this occasion are
two older men, their sons, their guests--two army generals--and Socrates.

It appears to be a good choice of persons with whom to attempt to understand the essence of courage. The two older men were sons of famous--and courageous--fathers, but they themselves were spoiled to the point that they have done little if anything courageous in their lives. They wish their sons to acquire positive qualities and since they cannot learn these from their fathers' example, they're asking the two army generals and Socrates how they might help in the positive development of their sons by other means, possibly by learning to fight in armor.

We begin, then, with two older men who demonstrate some amount of courage by openly admitting that they have not lived very wisely, that they are concerned for their sons' well-being, and are seeking advice from persons they consider to be knowledgeable and honest. Lysimachus and Melesias believe that Laches and Nisias can be courageous enough to speak truthfully when asked for their advice--not merely giving an answer to please the petitioners.

Laches also mentions that he had fought with Socrates in the battle of Delium and can testify to Socrates' courage in warfare.

Melesias' son Thucydides is named after his grandfather, an interesting detail which Plato has crafted into the drama.

The historical Thucydides, an Athenian aristocrat, was probably in his late twenties at the time the Peloponnesian War began. He realized its importance from the beginning and began planning to write its history. In 424 BCE, (twenty years before the war ended in the defeat of Athens), Thucydides had been elected an Athenian general, and for failing to prevent the loss of an important city to the Spartans was exiled from Athens, whether justly or not.

He spent the rest of the War collecting data and talking with participants in the various military maneuvers, writing the most famous account of the war between Athens and Sparta: History of the Peloponnesian War. Herodotus, writing a few decades earlier than Thucydides, recorded almost all he heard, whether he believed it himself or not, producing a very questionable historical record. Thucydides stands at the other pole; he gathers all available evidence, then shapes his account to emphasize the truth in strict adherence to carefully verified facts.

Hence we have an interesting name to include in the mix of the dialogue: a participant is named after a famous Athenian whose courage had been questioned in regard to his losing an important battle. But even after being exiled, he had shown courage by writing an outstanding history which presented what he considered to be the truth, not just an account pleasing to those in power.

Lysimachus' son Aristides is also named after his famous grandfather. Aristides had not only been a very courageous military leader but a fair and equitable administrator--so much so that he had been called "Aristides the Just." When exiled unjustly by
Themistocles, Aristides did not hold a grudge against his detractor. Thus we have in this case not only an example of courage but of courage with justice and equanimity.

Keeping in mind that Plato is operating at a higher metaphysical and spiritual level in the dialogues, we carefully peruse all the veiled or implied elements as well as those on the surface.

**How Is Plato Teaching Us In His Dialogues?**

In the *Laches*, Socrates appears to be having an ordinary discussion with four other participants, seeking answers to specific questions and definitions of certain terms.

But from the very beginning, Socrates makes it clear that the dialectical investigation is much more than a superficial disputation and that the goal of the dialogue is actually to understand the essence of a kind of knowledge of which the purpose is the betterment of the souls of the two youths in specific and human souls in general.

The surface question—Should the sons of Lysimachus and Melesias be taught the art of fighting in armor?—is not the real goal of this dialectical investigation.

The superficial interpretation of the phenomenon as an instance of argumentation is a complete distortion of what is in actuality a shared mystical experience.

Though the dialogue is conducted through the use of words, the ultimate purpose of the dialectical investigation is not to discover the definitions or meanings of words. The purpose of the elenctic process is:

- Understanding the essence of a metaphysical Form: in this instance, courage
- Self-understanding and self-improvement on the part of the participants
- Revealing inconsistent, unproductive, or thoughtless beliefs, characteristics, or behaviors to establish true and sound understandings and behaviors
- Purging the soul of internal and external obstacles that interfere with learning
- Becoming aware of one's ignorance and redirecting oneself towards a virtuous life, beneficial to one's soul

Socrates' orchestration of the dialogue involves persons referring to their ordinary experience; for example, their experience in battle or their ordinary understanding of words and concepts. But Socrates' purpose is to move the participants—and us as readers or listeners—beyond the ordinary world of meanings and experiences to a higher state of awareness.
A Platonic dialogue is—from one aspect—a kind of litmus test\textsuperscript{6} to determine the quality of the reader or listener. To a non-enlightened and self-satisfied person reading or listening to a dialogue, it can seem to prove the utter futility of abstract argumentation and definition-seeking. To that kind of person, the dialogue will appear to have no relevance or applicability to him and he may then assume that philosophy in general is a useless waste of time.

The failed interpretations of Plato's dialogues cover a wide range and always tell more about the interpreter than the dialogue. For example, most academic "philosophers" misconstrue Plato's dialogues as nothing more than arguments or debates, with Socrates "cross-examining" and belittling the other participants. At the same time, some of these pedants assume that Plato was setting out a system of doctrines in his dialogues.

I would agree with Gonzalez\textsuperscript{7} when he asks: "Can there be any form of writing less suited to presenting a systematic philosophy than Plato's dramatic dialogues?"

"We find the seeds of all philosophical systems in Plato's thought, without it itself being one of these systems; it is the idea of philosophy, the crucible in which the different forms of philosophy are born, the unchanging sun in the middle of philosophy's planetary movements and formations... Plato philosophizes where others indoctrinate, he lifts one's spirit to the pure essence of the Idea where others degrade and confine it to the letter of a system. This is why Platonism is the very spirit of philosophy or Philosophy Itself."

Friedrich Ast, \textit{Geschichte und System der Platonism Philosophie}

Instead of presenting a system of doctrines, Socrates leads the participants in the dialogue (and the reader/listener) into a higher state of awareness. He begins by encouraging Laches and Nicias to act on their assumption that they possess sufficient experience and knowledge to give competent advice about how young men should be educated.

Laches and Nicias are quite eager to give advice to Lysimachus and Melesias, presuming that their mere past experience and some sense of what a word like "courage" means is sufficient qualification to give expert advice.

Socrates encourages Laches and Nicias to launch into their advice-giving, but it soon becomes clear to all the participants that the two equally "experienced experts" have arrived at loggerheads, disagreeing completely as to how to educate young men.

Plato is showing that even the most experienced—and most presumptuous—persons do not have the special kind of knowledge required to assist in the improvement of the human soul. The dialectical process he is orchestrating will ultimately lead to that kind of knowledge, which in part will consist in having rid oneself of pretension of knowledge or skill which one does not actually possess.
Socrates is dealing with four persons who come to the dialogue with specific assumptions and pretensions. For example, Lysimachus and Melesias assume that mere experience, on the part of Laches and Nicias, is an adequate basis for being able to provide sound advice about educating young boys. Now that Laches and Nicias have come to a point of disagreement, Lysimachus assumes that this is a mere dispute that can be settled by majority vote and asks Socrates to cast his.

At this point, Socrates shows that a mere majority vote does not lead to the kind of knowledge they are after, that a person's opinion—to be useful—must be based on genuine understanding. Socrates also takes this occasion to show that the surface question about whether or not the sons should learn how to fight in armor is not the main concern; that they are actually pursuing the understanding of what kind of knowledge enables a person to assist in the betterment of the human soul.

Socrates now addresses another assumption which Lysimachus and Melesias as well as Laches and Nicias hold: that genuine knowledge can be gained by studying with sophists, the only teachers who claim to teach how to improve the human soul. Socrates says, ironically, that he has never been taught by sophists, because he is too poor to pay their fees. Part of the reason Nicias presumes that he has knowledge of such a word as "courage" is that he has studied with the sophist Damon.

Laches, Nicias, and Socrates now agree that a person who has the knowledge of how to improve the human soul should be able to demonstrate that they possess this knowledge. They also agree that such knowledge requires virtue and that the specific virtue they should try to comprehend is courage. Socrates begins to work with another assumption of Laches and Nicias: that an understanding of a virtue such as courage is demonstrated merely by being able to arrive at a consistent definition of the word "courage."

Laches suggests that endurance is always a factor in courage and Socrates shows that that is not the case—that sometimes retreat is a real sign of courage. Socrates agrees, however, that endurance can sometimes be an aspect of courageous behavior, and suggests that their persisting in dialectical inquiry is a way of understanding and demonstrating courage. "We are gaining the understanding of the knowledge required for helping to improve human souls by what we are ourselves doing in this process of Dialectic," Socrates is saying.

And Plato is saying: "You readers of this dialectical investigation, by your perseverance in studying what's happening in this written dialogue, are developing an experiential understanding of yourselves (e.g. how easy it is to be put off by long passages of text) and of higher Ideas such as Courage. You're observing Socrates acknowledge that he doesn't have a definitional knowledge of 'courage'—which most people take to be a necessary sign of possessing courage."

Nicias persists in believing that a person can only be said to possess courage if he can provide a workable definition of the word. He also believes that one attains a virtue such as courage by having theoretical knowledge of it. He then demonstrates, he believes, that he has courage by offering his definition of courage as knowledge of what is to be
dreaded or dared either in war or in anything else. Socrates shows Nicias that what he is really saying is that courage is knowledge not merely of what is to be dreaded and what dared, but a practical knowledge concerning all goods and evils at every stage. Socrates then shows that this definition of courage means that it consists in all virtues— and therefore is not a proper definition of a specific virtue called courage.

"Socrates . . . has the courage of recognizing . . . his own vulnerability before the truth. His courage is inseparable from his confession of ignorance . . . He has the courage to risk inquiring beyond experience, to seek knowledge actively, despite the recognition that this knowledge will never provide the victory of complete mastery nor dispel ignorance once and for all." 8

To the participants in the dialogue Socrates is saying, "we've experienced that the knowledge required for helping to improve human souls—our true goal—cannot be attained by trying to define a word such as 'courage,' is not a technical knowledge attained by being taught by self-appointed experts such as sophists, and is not even gained by being able to demonstrate it in specific behaviors. The knowledge we seek can only be attained by the dialectical process we're engaged in: opening ourselves to inspiration from our Higher Consciousness, admitting and acknowledging our false presumption of knowledge, and persevering in a genuine search for experiential understanding of a Higher Idea."

The outcome of the dialogue Laches for the original participants—as it should be for us as well—is that in light of our continual discovery of new areas of ignorance—through dialectic—we all should continue to search for wisdom.

God has not vouchsafed to His creatures any means of attaining unto knowledge of Him except through impotence to attain unto knowledge of Him."

Hujwiri, Revelation of the Veiled Mysteries

How Plato Teaches in the Meno

To begin, you may want to refer to the excerpt from the Meno at the end of this chapter containing the relevant parts of the Meno or read through the entire document in a separate book to see how Socrates teaches a young slave boy by eliciting his intuitive memory of geometrical realities.

Mathematics and especially geometry were seen by such Perennialist teachers as Pythagoras and Plato as among the most effective means of understanding and entering a spiritual realm composed of eternal, unchanging (invariant) Forms or Ideas. The world of mathematics is one where all entities are defined and if we follow its principles then our conclusions are unequivocal. We say that it is a "closed" world—because most of its
elements are defined, but we must remember that the world of mathematics also contains symbols which point beyond it: irrational numbers, transcendental numbers, infinity, point, zero, etc.

Plato begins his teaching at this point in the Meno by asserting that all learning is recollection. He bases this on the idea that the human soul is immortal and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or in the higher world, has knowledge of everything. If we want to learn about something, we must go to that source of all knowledge: the human soul. Since the human soul already possesses all knowledge, then true learning must be recollection.

The dialogue had begun with an investigation of Virtue, with Meno, a sophist, asking a rhetorical question: How can we investigate Virtue if we don't already know what virtue is? Socrates answers that we can investigate Forms--eternal Ideas--because our soul already possesses all knowledge.

To demonstrate his point--and lead Meno further into the dialectical process--he shows that a slave boy, untutored in geometry already has an intuitive knowledge of some aspects of geometry. As we read the account of Socrates' teaching the slave boy, we come to the same interesting point that we did in studying the Laches:

The actual goal of the investigation is something which cannot be known through ordinary experience.

In the Laches we saw that the knowledge of how to improve the human soul cannot be known through defining the word "courage," receiving training in courage from self-appointed pseudo-experts (sophists), or speaking of or demonstrating instances of courageous behavior. In the Meno, Socrates, Meno, and the young slave boy are investigating a phenomenon that is equally "unknowable:" the length of the side of a square containing eight square feet is an irrational number: the square root of 8.

Engaging the young boy in the process of dialectic brings him to the point where he can recognize the correct answer to the problem, even though he cannot state the length of the sides in numbers (since it is an irrational number). And the young lad also arrives at a very positive state of consciousness in which he recognizes his ignorance (of how to quantify the sides of the square) and is eager to learn the answer. The slave boy's attitude is in sharp contrast to that of Meno, who continues to demonstrate a presumptuous and arrogant air of self-importance which means that he cannot possibly learn anything.

As we saw with courage in the Laches, we now find in the Meno: by engaging in the process of dialectic (maieutic psychagogy), we learn to acknowledge and admit our ignorance and persevere in seeking true understanding.

What the young slave boy recognized is something which cannot be taught. He could be required to memorize the answers to problems—the counterfeit method used in pseudo-education in America today. But he would not know anything; he would merely be a persons stuffed with other peoples' ideas and "knowledge." Socrates demonstrated that the
slave boy already had an intuitive knowledge of elementary aspects of geometry; learning is remembering.

"Most of the points I have made in support of my argument are not such as I can confidently assert; but that the belief in the duty of inquiring after what we do not know will make us better and braver and less helpless than the notion that there is not even a possibility of discovering what we do not know, nor any duty of inquiring after it--this is a point for which I am determined to do battle, so far as I am able, both in word and deed."

Socrates

As we study Plato's dialogues, it becomes increasingly clear that Socrates was a truly advanced Perennialist teacher who was able to induce participants in a elenctic inquiry into a higher state of consciousness. Socrates' powers of dialectical initiation were truly magical. We can gain a sense of this magic through this newly-constructed dialogue.

A New Platonic Dialogue: Aristocles

Persons of the dialogue:
Perictionè, Aristocles, Glaucon, Adeimantus, Socrates

Perictionè, the mother, and her three sons, Aristocles, Glaucon, Adeimantus, are conversing in their living room.

Perictionè: Shortly before his death, my good husband Ariston, and your father, wrote a binding will spelling out what properties should be left to you, his sons. Being an exceptionally wise man, Ariston wrote in his will that he was dividing his estates between you in such a way as to insure that you, his sons, would find a truly initiated man to be your teacher and guide.

Along with the homestead which he deeded to me, your father left seventeen estates between you and decreed in his will that these properties should be divided among you in a very definite manner. None of the properties was to be sold before the division of properties was completed. Your father's will expressly stated that you, Aristocles, the oldest, should have half, Glaucon, the middle in age, one-third, and you, Adeimantus, the youngest, should have one-ninth.

However, since your father's death, we have invited over two dozen persons claiming to be advanced teachers and none of them has been able to divide the estates between you in the apportionment set out in your father's will.

Adeimantus: Perhaps we should sell the estates after all, and divide the sum of money in the fractions our father has set out.

Glaucon: No, our attorney tells us that this would invalidate the will.
Aristocles: The teachers you have invited, mother, though all possessing grand reputations, have all been sophists, as these are the most public teachers in Athens. Perhaps we should inquire of a teacher who is not a sophist.

Perictionè: Who do you suggest, Aristocles?

Aristocles: I have been studying for a short while with a teacher named Socrates, and I have asked him here today to see if he can solve the riddle of our father's bequest.

Perictionè: Excellent, I have heard that Socrates is a wise teacher. Perhaps he can find the solution to the enigma after all.

Socrates is announced by a servant and enters the room.

Perictionè: Welcome, Socrates. It is our fond hope that you can find a resolution to this conundrum. It appears that only a teacher who is also a magician can solve the enigma.

Socrates: I do not claim to be a magician, Madame, but I will do my best. Tell me how your husband's will decreed that the apportionment of properties is to be made.

Perictionè tells Socrates of the details of Ariston's will.

Socrates muses for a few moments, then speaks to Aristocles.

Socrates: You have been studying with me for a short while, is that not true?

Aristocles: Yes, for just a little over two months.

Socrates: Do not your friends call you Plato, because you have a wide frame--and a broad turn of mind?

Aristocles (somewhat embarrassed): Yes, they have given me that nickname.

Socrates: Then you and your brothers follow my way of thinking in this matter, and I believe we can arrive at a solution to the problem of your father's bequest.

Everyone is excited by Socrates' statement.

Socrates: Glaucon, we will first add my own estate to the seventeen your father has left you three brothers. That will then make how many estates to be divided among you?

Glaucon: Eighteen in total.

Socrates (to Perictionè): Did your husband's will disallow the adding of an estate to the sum he left his sons?

Perictionè: No, there was no such stipulation.

Socrates: Now, Adeimantus, you were to receive what fraction of your father's estates?

Adeimantus: One-ninth.
Socrates: And one-ninth of eighteen is how many?

Adeimantus: Two.

Socrates: And you, Glaucon, were to receive what fraction?

Glaucon: One-third.

Socrates: And one-third of eighteen is what amount?

Glaucon: Six.

Socrates: Finally, you, Plato, were to receive what fraction of the estates?

Aristocles: Half, which is nine.

Socrates: Excellent. Then, Plato, what is the sum of 2, 6, and 9?

Aristocles: Seventeen.

Socrates: And the one remaining, the eighteenth, I will reclaim as mine. And the enigma is solved.

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1 Elenchus comes from the Greek word for "examine" or "investigate." In both the Meno and Book I of the Commonwealth (commonly mistranslated as The Republic), Plato compares elenchus to a Mystery initiation ritual, indicating that it plays a complex role in the experience of the teacher and student. Elenchus is today frequently misdefined as "cross-examination" or "refutation." It's actually the process of revealing inconsistent, unproductive, or thoughtless beliefs, characteristics, or ideas and establishing true and sound understandings. Socrates' elenchus revealed self-contradictions in the participants' positions to guard against taking another person as an expert when he wasn't. It also revealed beliefs the participants didn't know they had. In Plato's dialogues, elenchus involves purging the soul of internal and external obstacles that interfere with learning. The purpose of elenchus was to help the participant become aware of his ignorance and redirect him towards a virtuous life, beneficial to his soul.

2 Recondite: hidden from sight, concealed; difficult or impossible for one of ordinary understanding or knowledge to comprehend [Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, tenth edition]


4 As usual, I have found it necessary to fashion my own translation of the dialogues from the original Greek text to bring out what I consider to be Plato’s original meanings.
The dialogue *Laches* ends with no agreed-on definition of courage. Plato would not have crafted a dialogue merely to show Socrates' failure to arrive at a definition; the purpose of the dialogue is clearly something other than that.

Litmus test: the use of an element, such as a treated paper or a specially constructed psychological inventory, to determine if a decisive quality or potency is present or not


Adapted from the Sufi story "Dividing Camels," presented by Idries Shah in *Thinkers of the East*

Excerpt from the *Meno*

Socrates: They say that the soul of man is immortal, and at one time has an end, which is termed dying, and at another time is born again, but is never destroyed. . . . The soul, then, as being immortal, and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or in the world below, has knowledge of them all; and it is no wonder that she should be able to call to remembrance all that she ever knew about virtue, and about everything; for as all nature is akin, and the soul has learned all things; there is no difficulty in her eliciting or as men say learning, out of a single recollection -all the rest, if a man is strenuous and does not faint; for all enquiry and all learning is but recollection. And therefore we ought not to listen to this sophistical argument about the impossibility of enquiry: for it will make us idle; and is sweet only to the sluggard; but the other saying will make us active and inquisitive. In that confiding, I will gladly enquire with you into the nature of virtue.

Meno: Yes, Socrates; but what do you mean by saying that we do not learn, and that what we call learning is only a process of recollection? Can you teach me how this is?

Socrates: I told you, Meno, just now that you were a rogue, and now you ask whether I can teach you, when I am saying that there is no teaching, but only recollection; and thus you imagine that you will involve me in a contradiction.

Meno: Indeed, Socrates, I protest that I had no such intention. I only asked the question from habit; but if you can prove to me that what you say is true, I wish that you would.

Socrates: It will be no easy matter, but I will try to please you to the utmost of my power. Suppose that you call one of your numerous attendants, that I may demonstrate on him.
Meno: Certainly. Come hither, boy.

Socrates: He is Greek, and speaks Greek, does he not?

Meno: Yes, indeed; he was born in the house.

Socrates: Attend now to the questions which I ask him, and observe whether he learns of me or only remembers.

Meno: I will.

Socrates: Tell me, boy, do you know that a figure like this is a square? *(Socrates begins to draw figures in the sand)*

[Boy] I do.

Socrates: And you know that a square figure has these four lines equal? [AB, BC, CD, DA]

[Boy] Certainly.

Socrates: And these lines which I have drawn through the middle of the square are also equal? *(lines ef and gh)*

[Boy] Yes.

Socrates: A square may be of any size?

[Boy] Certainly.

Socrates: And if one side of the figure be of two feet, and the other side be of two feet, how much will the whole be? Let me explain: if in one direction the space was of two feet, and in other direction of one foot, the whole would be of two feet taken once?
[Boy] Yes.

Socrates: But since this side is also of two feet, there are twice two feet?

[Boy] There are.

Socrates: Then the square is of twice two feet?

[Boy] Yes.

Socrates: And how many are twice two feet? count and tell me.

[Boy] Four, Socrates.

Socrates: And might there not be another square twice as large as this, and having like this the lines equal? [AJ, JK, KL, LA]

[Boy] Yes.
[Boy] Yes.
Socrates: And of how many feet will that be?

[Boy] Of eight feet.

Socrates: And now try and tell me the length of the line which forms the side of that double square: this is two feet—what will that be?

[Boy] Clearly, Socrates, it will be double.

Socrates: Do you observe, Meno, that I am not teaching the boy anything, but only asking him questions; and now he fancies that he knows how long a line is necessary in order to produce a figure of eight square feet; does he not?

Meno: Yes.
Socrates: And does he really know?

Meno: Certainly not.

Socrates: He only guesses that because the square is double, the line is double.

Meno: True.

Socrates: Observe him while he recalls the steps in regular order. (To the Boy.) Tell me, boy, do you assert that a double space comes from a double line? Remember that I am not speaking of an oblong, but of a figure equal every way, and twice the size of this—that is to say of eight feet; and I want to know whether you still say that a double square comes from double line?

[Boy] Yes.
Socrates: But does not this line (AB) become doubled if we add another such line here (BJ is added)?

[Boy] Certainly.

Socrates: And four such lines [AJ, JK, KL, LA] will make a space containing eight feet?

[Boy] Yes.

Socrates: Let us draw such a figure: (adding DL, LK, and JK). Would you not say that this is the figure of eight feet?

[Boy] Yes.

Socrates: And are there not these four squares in the figure, each of which is equal to the figure of four feet? (Socrates draws in CM and CN)

[Boy] True.

Socrates: And is not that four times four?

[Boy] Certainly.

Socrates: And four times is not double?

[Boy] No, indeed.
Socrates: But how much?

[Boy] Four times as much.

Socrates: Therefore the double line, boy, has given a space, not twice, but four times as much.

[Boy] True.

Socrates: Four times four are sixteen—are they not?

[Boy] Yes.

Socrates: So our question is: what line would give you a space of eight feet, as this gives one of sixteen feet;—do you see?

[Boy] Yes.

Socrates: And the space of four feet is made from this half line? [AB]

[Boy] Yes.

Socrates: Good; and is not a space of eight feet twice the size of this square [ABCD], and half the size of the other square [AJ, JK, KL, LA]?

[Boy] Certainly.
Socrates: Such a space, then, will be made out of a line greater than this one [AB], and less than that one [AJ]?

[Boy] Yes; I think so.

Socrates: Very good; I like to hear you say what you think. And now tell me, is not this [AB] a line of two feet and that [AJ] of four?

[Boy] Yes.

Socrates: Then the line which forms the side of the eight feet square ought to be more than this line [AB] of two feet, and less than the other [AJ] of four feet?

[Boy] It ought.

Socrates: Try and see if you can tell me how much it will be.

[Boy] Three feet.

Socrates: Then if we add a half to this line of two, (Socrates identifies Bo as half of BJ) that will be the line of three. Here are two and there is one; and on the other side, here are two also and there is one: and that makes the figure of which you speak? (Socrates completes the square Aopq)
[Boy] Yes.

Socrates: But if there are three feet this way and three feet that way, the whole space will be three times three feet?

[Boy] That is evident.

Socrates: And how much are three times three feet?

[Boy] Nine.

Socrates: And how much is the double of four?

[Boy] Eight.

Socrates: Then the figure of size eight is not made out of a side of three?

[Boy] No.

Socrates: But from what line?-tell me exactly; and if you would rather not reckon, try and show me the line.

[Boy] Indeed, Socrates, I do not know.

Socrates: Do you see, Meno, what advances he has made in his power of recollection? He did not know at first, and he does not know now, what is the side of a figure of eight feet: but then he thought that he knew, and answered confidently as if he knew, and had no difficulty; now he has a difficulty, and neither knows nor fancies that he knows.

Meno: True.

Socrates: Is he not better off in knowing his ignorance?

Meno: I think that he is.

Socrates: If we have made him doubt, and given him the "torpedo's shock," have we done him any harm?

Meno: I think not.

Socrates: We have certainly, as would seem, assisted him in some degree to the discovery of the truth; and now he will wish to remedy his ignorance, but then he would have been ready to tell all the world again and again that the double space should have a double side.

Meno: True.
Socrates: But do you suppose that he would ever have enquired into or learned what he fancied that he knew, though he was really ignorant of it, until he had fallen into perplexity under the idea that he did not know, and had desired to know?

Meno: I think not, Socrates.

Socrates: Then he was the better for the torpedo's touch?

Meno: I think so.

Socrates: Mark now the farther development. I shall only ask him, and not teach him, and he shall share the enquiry with me: and do you watch and see if you find me telling or explaining anything to him, instead of eliciting his opinion. (Socrates erases the previous drawing and starts anew) Tell me, boy, is not this the square of four feet which I have drawn? (ABCD)

Boy: Yes.

Socrates: And now I add another square equal to the former one? (BJMC)

Boy: Yes.

Socrates: And a third, which is equal to either of them? (CMKN)

Boy: Yes.

Socrates: Suppose that we fill up the vacant corner? (DCNL)

Boy: Very good.
Socrates: Here, then, there are four equal spaces?

Boy: Yes.

Socrates: And how many times larger is this space than this other?

Boy: Four times.

Socrates: But it ought to have been twice only, as you will remember.

Boy: True.

Socrates: And does not this line, reaching from corner to corner, bisect each of these spaces? (Socrates draws BD)

Boy: Yes.

Socrates: And are there not here four equal lines which contain this space? (Socrates finishes BMND)

Boy: There are.

Socrates: Look and see how much this space is.
Boy: I do not understand.

Socrates: Has not each interior line cut off the inner half of each of the four spaces?

Boy: Yes.

Socrates: And how many spaces are there in this section? (BMND)

Boy: Four.

Socrates: And how many in this? (ABCD)

Boy: Two.

Socrates: And four is how many times two?

Boy: Twice.

Socrates: And this space [BMND] is of how many feet?

Boy: Of eight feet.

Socrates: And from what line do you get this figure?
Boy: From this [BD].

Socrates: That is, from the line which extends from corner to corner of the figure of four feet?

Boy: Yes.

Socrates: And that is the line which the learned call the diagonal. And if this is the proper name, then you, Meno's slave, are prepared to affirm that the double space is the square of the diagonal?

Boy: Certainly, Socrates.

Socrates: What do you say of him, Meno? Were not all these answers given out of his own head?

Meno: Yes, they were all his own.

Socrates: And yet, as we were just now saying, he did not know?

Meno: True.

Socrates: But still he had in him those notions of his-had he not?

Meno: Yes.

Socrates: Then he who does not know may still have true notions of that which he does not know?

Meno: He has.

Socrates: And at present these notions have just been stirred up in him, as in a dream; but if he were frequently asked the same questions, in different forms, he would know as well as any one at last?

Meno: I dare say.

Socrates: Without any one teaching him he will recover his knowledge for himself, if he is only asked questions?

Meno: Yes.

Socrates: And this spontaneous recovery of knowledge in him is recollection?

Meno: True.
Socrates: And this knowledge which he now has must he not either have acquired or always possessed?

Meno: Yes.

Socrates: But if he always possessed this knowledge he would always have known; or if he has acquired the knowledge he could not have acquired it in this life, unless he has been taught geometry; for he may be made to do the same with all geometry and every other branch of knowledge. Now, has any one ever taught him all this? You must know about him, if, as you say, he was born and bred in your house.

Meno: And I am certain that no one ever did teach him.

Socrates: And yet he has the knowledge?

Meno: The fact, Socrates, is undeniable.

Socrates: But if he did not acquire the knowledge in this life, then he must have had and learned it at some other time?

Meno: Clearly he must.

Socrates: Which must have been the time when he was not a man?

Meno: Yes.

Socrates: And if there have been always true thoughts in him, both at the time when he was and was not a man, which only need to be awakened into knowledge by putting questions to him, his soul must have always possessed this knowledge, for he always either was or was not a man?

Meno: Obviously.

Socrates: And if the truth of all things always existed in the soul, then the soul is immortal. Wherefore be of good cheer, and try to recollect what you do not know, or rather what you do not remember.

Meno: I feel, somehow, that I like what you are saying.

Socrates: And I, Meno, like what I am saying. Some things I have said of which I am not altogether confident. But that we shall be better and braver and less helpless if we think that we ought to enquire, than we should have been if we indulged in the idle fancy that there was no knowing and no use in seeking to know what we do not know;—that is a theme upon which I am ready to fight, in word and deed, to the utmost of my power.
Meno: There again, Socrates, your words seem to me excellent.

Socrates: Then, as we are agreed that a man should enquire about that which he does not know, shall you and I make an effort to enquire together into the nature of virtue?

(And the dialogue continues)
Chapter Ten: Dialectic As Transformative Interchange:  
The Ontology of Platonic Dialectic

Dialectic is a phenomenon which must be actually experienced before it can be fully understood. Attempting to make Dialectic clear to persons who haven't participated in its reality is like trying to convey an adequate idea of sight to a person born blind. Those discerning enough to seek out true information about, prepare for, and then actually experience Dialectic interchange, become members of a small philosophical fellowship.

Our ongoing study of the phenomenon of Platonic Dialectic is an integral part of our quest to understand the elemental nature of reality. Plato’s philosophy only makes sense to persons who commit themselves to the search for truth and wisdom, recognizing that there are vast continents of ignorance within their psyche which they need to illuminate and transform. Only if they have an intense desire to understand the veiled aspects of reality will Plato's teachings have any appeal for them.

"Who then are lovers of wisdom (philosophers)?
Those who seek to discern the ultimate nature of reality."

Plato, *The Commonwealth* (475e)

Dialectic As Personal Transformation

The central question about Plato's use of the dramatic dialogue form to present his ideas is how this form provided him with elements which were crucial to his goals. Plato wanted to explicate specific ideas and procedures, to help students understand all aspects of Reality, and he had the intent of providing a dramatic structure which would both engage readers and enable them to participate in a simulated event to learn how to practice Dialectic.

"Plato, through his use of the dialogue form, invites the reader to ask questions and to look and listen for answers, invites him to participate in a dialogue in which Plato's own writings play the role Socrates plays within the dramatic world of the dialogues. This invitation is not to be taken lightly; for if accepted it commits the reader to 'much close study . . . and a long companionship'; it is nothing less than an invitation to obtain a philosophical education by participating directly in philosophy."

Herman L. Sinaiko, *Love, Knowledge, and Discourse in Plato: Dialogue and Dialectic in Phaedrus, Republic, Parmenides*
Personal progress occurs in and through the transformative elements of Dialectical interchange. The Socratic elenchus is no mere intellectual discussion, but a discovery of the deeper aspects of one's self—which is why so many reject it, but also why it can lead to a genuine transformation of the psyche through self-knowledge. It is the actual rebirth of the participant's selfhood into the realm of Reason and the search for truth that makes Dialectic not merely an investigative but a transformative and even a kind of spiritual practice. If the participant persists in the Dialectic process, she finds herself transported out of her "accidental and irrational arbitrariness" and reconstituted in the light of Higher Awareness. She will also begin to discover and remake her self-identity in the values of higher rational processes and self-direction. She will discover that the pursuit of knowledge has involved her in the values and virtues of understanding and in the participant community of that way of life.

"... What is at stake in conversation with Socrates is not only the topic of this particular exchange, but the opportunity for other conversations and indeed for the whole rich social relationship of his educational-dialogical circle. The call to commit oneself—one's thought and ultimately one's life, as Nicias suggests—to the test of the elenchus is also a call to involve oneself in... membership in rational community with Socrates. What Socrates offers is not only thought, but friendship, not only discourse, but shared values and a shared life. One does not engage in the practice of Socratic dialectic as a solitary individual, but as one among others, equals in the epistemic/educational community. The failure of so many of Socrates' partners to persist in the elenchus is a turning away not only from exercising their own reason, but also from the opportunity to join in a community of people committed to reason. It must have been puzzling to the young Plato that anyone would choose against membership in that more beautiful city." ¹

Dialectical interchange does not involve Socrates teaching virtue as a doctrine but the activation of a mystical process which provides the opportunity for a participant to gain a deeper understanding of his own moral beliefs, to the recognition that his ideas are inconsistent and that he "doesn't really know what his values are." Ideally this process will burst his inflated ego and encourage him to make a commitment to a life of reason. It encourages him to learn to think for himself and abandon abject reliance on self-appointed authorities. The participant learns to examine his actions in relation to ideas and plans supported by evidence and experience. He learns to examine whether or not what he believes he knows is really something he knows, continually examining his ideas and behavior.

"The philosophic endeavor, as represented by Plato, begins when we are faced with a value problem, that is, with a difficulty which requires our attention because it appears insoluble according to our current values. Philosophy proper starts with the realization that our values are inadequate to the situation we face, and it proceeds to search for new and better ones."

Herman L. Sinaiko, op. cit.
In Plato's dialogues, Socrates doesn't attempt to coerce a person into self-evaluation and a rational life-style. The participant learns—or doesn't learn—to prefer truth to personal contentment, ethical behavior to safety and ease. The participant must make the choice for himself.

"... On this view, Socrates' ethics would emerge out of and reflect the practice of rational inquiry itself, the values of moral-philosophical discourse. Socrates' ethics may then be understood as the substantive embodiment of the formal principles of such discourse and mutual involvement: the primacy of the good of truth over superiority or honor or safety or physical desire; the commitment of the rational inquirer to values of moral courage, intellectual humility, and dialectical fairness; the willingness to suffer "punishment" (refutation), if such punishment or refutation is warranted, rather than do it to another, if it is not; the realization of personal interest and the common good; and the imperative of applying one's findings to the conduct of life. Socratic ethics, on this view, would be the idealized extension of the norms required by and created in the very practice of dialectic." 2

Plato chose the dialogue form to express his teachings because it allowed him to portray Socrates as a person who not only talked about such values as virtue and self-knowledge, but to exhibit them in the ongoing drama of the dialogue. In the Hippias Major, Socrates is unable to persuade Hippias to recognize and acknowledge his own self-contradictions and conceits of wisdom.

At that point, Socrates states ironically that he, unlike Hippias, cannot rest easy with eloquent and beautiful speeches about beauty and virtue, because he, unlike Hippias, is held to account for his beliefs by an inner persona who is always cross-examining him. "He is a very close relative of mine and lives in the same house, and when I go home and he hears me give utterance to these opinions he asks me whether I am not ashamed of my audacity in talking about a beautiful way of life, when questioning makes it evident that I do not even know the meaning of the word 'beauty.'" (304d.)

The dialogue form allowed Plato to represent Socrates as a person who engaged in constant self-examination. Plato taught that human beings learn to live lives of excellence by imitating and effectively identifying with a model. That was why Plato suggested that degrading and devolutionary social forces--such as we now suffer from in TV and radio--should be eliminated from a genuine commonwealth. Plato's dialogues represent Socrates as the paradigm of intellectual and moral excellence, a practitioner of philosophy, a genuine lover of and seeker of wisdom. Readers of the dialogues learn to follow Socrates' example and thereby become philosophers of high intellectual and moral attainment.

The Enigmatic Dialectic

In previous chapters we've discovered what an enigmatic and complex phenomenon Plato's Dialectic really is. Dialectic is, among other things, an extraordinary kind of shared mystical experience in which a Perennialist Master--such as Socrates or Plato--serves as a
psychagogic midwife, overseeing the process of the divulgence of, the bringing into being of new elements: ideas, feelings, inspirations, and images. As is clear from the *Phaedo* and other dialogues, Plato believed that we can only discover truth when we are in our higher consciousness.

Plato made a profound distinction between the ordinary visible world and the higher invisible, supersensible world in which only mathematics and Dialectic can operate. It's a formidable challenge to comprehend Plato's conception of the extraordinary difference between the realm of commonplace reality and the intelligible realm, between the powers of everyday sense perception and the higher powers of mathematical reasoning and Dialectical discernment. We accept this challenge because we discover that his unique conception of the realms of being and knowledge allows us to gain an understanding of aspects of reality which no other system of thought can provide.

"Understand then," said [Socrates], "that by the intelligible realm I mean that which Reason itself apprehends by the power of Dialectic, treating its deliberations not as axioms but literally as hypotheses, underpinnings, footings (like steps of a stair), and springboards so to speak, to enable it to rise to that which requires no assumptions and is the starting-point of all knowledge. And after attaining to understanding, Dialectic apprehends the elemental inferences of its insights, and so, making no use whatever of any object of sense, proceeds by means of Forms and through Forms to its conclusions which are Forms."

"I understand," [Glaucon] said; "not fully, for it is no slight task that you appear to have in mind, but I do comprehend that you mean to distinguish the realm of ordinary reality and the intelligible realm, which is apprehended and investigated by the science of dialectic. You see the intelligible realm as containing truer and more precise apprehensions than conjectures about the objects of the so-called arts and sciences whose assumptions are arbitrary starting-points. And though it is true that those who study the objects of these sciences are forced to use both thought and sensation, because they do not go back to a genuine first principle, but proceed from hypotheses, you think that they do not truly understand these objects, even though, given their assumptions, they seem to them to be intelligible. And you seem to me to call the activity of mathematicians thought but not understanding, thought being intermediate between opinion and understanding."

"Your exposition is most adequate. Thus there are four powers of the soul, corresponding to the four subsections of our line: Understanding is the highest, thought second, belief third, and conjecture last. Arrange them in a ratio, and consider that each shares in discernment to the degree that the subsection it is set over apprehends truth."

*Commonwealth* VI: 511b-e
One of the most important insights we receive from Plato's discussion of the immense difference between conjecture, belief, knowledge, and understanding is that Dialectic is, in part, a science used by select persons to achieve surpassing comprehension of the Forms through the attainment of a higher state of consciousness. Dialectic is not, therefore, merely ordinary conversation, discussion, argumentation, cross-examination, or debate. Dialectic puts its participants in touch with an invisible, supersensible domain beyond ordinary reality. But, even though Plato makes it clear that Dialectic is a preternatural \(^3\) phenomenon inexplicable by ordinary means, unenlightened persons continue to insist on trying to explain it in everyday terms.

**Dialectic As Locating Our Consciousness In a Higher Realm**

Plato's teaching of the Divided Line is so extraordinary, so different from the common conception of human life and thought, that we find it difficult to credit that he is actually saying what he says. Plato's philosophy, even after all these centuries, remains an esoteric tradition because people refuse to believe that his ideas mean what they declare.

First, we must realize that in Plato's figure of the Divided Line, the line itself represents Unitary Reality. Plato is saying: there is only one Reality. That One Reality is composed of the Visible Realm \(\text{and}\) the Invisible Realm. We live in a Reality which contains both the physical, changing world and the eternal, changeless world. Most people have their consciousness only in the visible world of everyday conjecture and belief; but a few—the philosophers—also experience the invisible world through mathematical reasoning or Dialectical understanding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visible Realm</th>
<th>Invisible Realm</th>
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<td>Physical, changing world</td>
<td>Eternal, changeless world</td>
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Plato's *Phaedo* explains that a person who seeks wisdom enters the eternal realm through philosophy: dissecuring the soul from its communion with the body and locating one's consciousness in the intelligible world.

The eternal, changeless realm is not something which is experienced only after we...
undergo physical death—the permanent severing of the soul from the body. It's possible to make contact with the Higher World through learning and practicing Dialectic.

"Dialectic is the only philosophical method which seeks for wisdom by anagogically transporting our foundational underpinnings so that our Higher Self ascends to the Origin."

Plato, *The Commonwealth VII*, 533d

Since there is only One Reality, philosophers locate their consciousness in the same Reality as other persons, but with wider awareness. While experiencing the terrestrial world they also have the capability of perceiving and acting in the transcendent world. It is One Reality, we must keep that in mind, but those who practice Dialectic are able to discern more and apprehend higher facets of that One Reality. So the experience of the Higher World is not a physical withdrawal from Reality, but an ascension to its transcendent aspect and level: a double consciousness.

We grasp this phenomenon by comparing a black and white and a color image of the same "reality." The black and white image represents the ordinary world and the powers of apprehension commonly experienced by persons in that world. The color image represents the power of apprehending the same world at a higher level of discernment.

A person's reality is composed both of her terrestrial existence and her eternal being. She enters the terrestrial realm from her state of eternal being; lives throughout her physical existence—usually without awareness of her primordial being—experiences physical death; then re-enters the state of consciousness of her eternal being. Person A (in the image below) lives only in the visible, physical world during her earthly existence. Person B (a philosopher in Plato's sense) lives both in the physical world and through spiritual death (dissevering her Higher Consciousness from her lower consciousness) makes contact with the Higher Realm of eternal being.
We must avoid interpreting the Higher Realm of eternal being as some kind of "heaven" located in another "place." Plato's Divided Line teaching indicates that there is only one universe, one reality.

Those who've experienced physical death live in the same Reality as do we who are now experiencing physical existence. Those who have passed on experience the Higher Realm in terms of what they were able to accomplish while in earthly existence. If they achieved higher intellectual, moral, and spiritual qualities during earth life, they experience the realm of eternal being as a joyful abode where they continue to evolve. Those who failed to achieve these qualities experience the Higher Realm as a place of self-discovery, remorse, and arduous correction.

"Plato's is . . . a philosophy of catharsis, ascent, realization, transformation of the way of feeling, of willing, of acting. Plato uses philosophy as a method for raising us above the conflict-ridden and contradictory world of the sensible to the harmonious world of Being, which is our original home."

Raphael, *Initiation Into the Philosophy of Plato*

There are thus two diverse approaches to human existence:

- Concentrating on the present moment, each day for itself and the devil take tomorrow; believing that human existence is all there is to personal reality; assuming that one is not accountable for his actions

- Realizing that a person is accountable for his actions; understanding that he is an eternal being who should act during physical life in a way to develop intellectual, moral, and spiritual qualities to further his personal evolution.

Understanding that there is only one reality, one universe and that it is possible to learn how to contact the Higher Realm through various portals or media: literature, painting, music, poetry, drama, nature, dialectical interchange, etc.

"There exists a faculty in the human mind which is immeasurably superior to all those which are grafted or engendered in us. By it we can attain to union with superior intelligences, finding ourselves raised above the scenes of this earthly life, and partaking of the higher existence and superhuman powers of the inhabitants of the celestial spheres.

"By this faculty we find ourselves liberated finally from the dominion of destiny,
and we become, as it were, the arbiters of our own fates. For, when the most excellent parts in us find themselves filled with energy; and when our soul is lifted up towards essences higher than science, it can separate itself from the conditions which hold it in the bondage of every-day life; it exchanges its ordinary existence for another one, it renounces the conventional habits which belong to the external order of things, to give itself up to and mix itself with another order of things which reigns in that most elevated state of being."

Iamblicus, The Egyptian Mysteries

Dialectic As Constitutive of Being

From studying Plato's, and other teachings we discover that Dialectic is not just a process of interpersonal interchange, but constitutes an aspect of reality itself.

Plato's teachings of the Divided Line and the Cave explicate not only the various levels of apprehending Reality but the diverse modes of being, from lower to higher. Each of the various levels is seen to be a lower mode of being in terms of the higher modes of being. So, for example, from the perspective of the ordinary world of physical existence, such phenomena as shadows, reflections, illusions, delusions, fantasies, hallucinations, visual anomalies, and psychological and physical possession are seen to possess a lower kind of reality. We say, for instance, that hallucinations and visual illusions are not "real." The mode of being aspect is represented in the Divided Line teaching by each mode possessing a longer extension than the one immediately below it and the Parable of the Cave teaching represents the four modes of being in terms of the person becoming not only more capable of comprehending reality but also of possessing a more independent mode of being.

Possession is the extreme lower point on a continuum in which the highest achievement is identification with a Higher Positive Power. Possession refers to:

• Domination by something: as a negative spirit, a passion, an obsession, an addiction, or a fixed idea

• A psychological state in which an individual's normal personality is replaced by another

Plato taught that Dialectic as a constituent of being is the quintessential mode of transformative interchange which leads to apprehension and understanding of the physical world and Higher Reality. Dialectic is the divulgence of reality to a conscious subject through a medium and the concomitant transformation of reality, the conscious agent, and the medium. Dialectic is transformative interchange.
"The illusion from which we are seeking to extricate ourselves is not that constituted by the realm of space and time, but that which comes from failing to know that realm from the standpoint of a higher vision. We are at length restored to consciousness by awakening in a real universe, the universe created by the One Mind as opposed to that perversion of it which has been created by our egocentric selves. We then see the visible world as the expression of the immanental life of God, the Divine in manifestation. In relating ourselves to it we live in that Presence subjectively in the depths of our mystical being. And in the properly integrated personality the two processes have become one."

Lawrence Hyde, The Nameless Faith

Dialectical As a Means of Apprehending the Higher Mode of Being

As with earlier thinkers, Plato was attempting to understand the primary essence of being. The Greek concept of physis (fusis) refers to the process of reality emerging into being, a self-revealing reality which is constantly unfolding, opening up, manifesting itself to consciousness and enduring.

This understanding of being is a part of the Perennial Tradition. Both Eastern and Western Perennialist masters teach that The One activates the mysterious arising of being out of non-being. The divulgence of reality to consciousness occurs as a primordial, emergent, opening-up illumination. Dialectic involves a person discovering the absolute by the light of Reason only, without any assistance of sense, persevering until by pure intelligence he arrives at the understanding of the Absolute Good, finding himself at last at the end of the intellectual world, as in the case of higher discernment moving beyond the visible realm to the invisible.

This expanded meaning of Dialectic is distinctly illustrated in social reality.

"It is important to keep in mind that the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity. The process by which the externalized products of human activity attain the character of objectivity is objectivation. The institutional world is objectivated human activity, and so is every single institution. In other words despite the objectivity that marks the social world in human experience, it does not thereby acquire an ontological status apart from the human activity that produced it . . . Man is capable of producing a world that he then experiences as something other than a human product . . . The relationship between man, the producer, and
the social world, his product, is and remains a dialectical one. "... Man (not of course, in isolation but in his collectivities) and his social world interact with each other. The product acts back upon the producer. Externalization and objectivation are moments in a continuing dialectical process, which is internalization (by which the objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness in the course of socialization)... It is already possible, however, to see the fundamental relationship of these three dialectical moments in social reality. Each of them corresponds to an essential characterization of the social world. Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product. It may also already be evident that an analysis of the social world that leaves out any one of these three moments will be distortive. One may further add that only with the transmission of the social world to a new generation (that is, internalization as effectuated in socialization) does the fundamental social dialectic appear in its totality. To repeat, only with the appearance of a new generation can one properly speak of a social world."

Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*

Dialectic utilizes various media to produce diverse "worlds" of transformative interchange.

"Myth, art, language and science appear as symbols; not in the sense of mere figures which refer to some given reality by means of suggestion and allegorical renderings, but in the sense of forces each of which produces and posits a world of its own. In these realms the spirit exhibits itself in that inwardly determined dialectic by virtue of which alone there is any reality, any organized and definite Being at all. Thus the special symbolic forms are not imitations, but organs of reality, since it is solely by their agency that anything real becomes an object for intellectual apprehension, and as such is made visible to us. The question as to what reality is apart from these forms, and what are its independent attributes, becomes irrelevant here. For the mind, only that can be visible which has some definite form; but every form of existence has its source in some peculiar way of seeing, some intellectual formulation and intuition of meaning."

Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*

"All progress leads from the more material to the less material; until at length it conducts us into regions where reality is perceived without the use of any laborious material structure at all. You yourselves know that individuals of higher mentality do not always have to pass through a material experience. If they are cognizant of its cause and effect, they can grasp it without painstakingly suffering it: they do not need the laborious material structure to see its reality. It is the same way in the
still higher levels beyond. You are all leading up to a consciousness of reality without its material shadows, its material reflections, its material manifestations, as aids to comprehension.”
Stewart Edward White, *Across the Unknown*

**Dialectic As Transformative Interchange**

We gain understanding of the world by interacting respectfully with it, instead of attempting to put her "on the rack," as Frances Bacon maintained, coercing her to give up her secrets—just as a heretic is put on the rack and gives up his apostasy.

For reality to transform him a subject has to open himself to the true essence of the unknown divulgence, he has to want to know by being awake to reality, he has to allow reality to transform him. For reality to be positively transformed by a subject, he has to have true understanding of reality and has to possess positive qualities.

For true Dialectic to occur between external reality and a human being, that person must remain in a state of reverence toward the unknown opening-up illumination, not falling prey to the will-to-dominate that which divulges itself to him, but remaining all ears and eyes for the summons of the awe-inspiring phenomena. The genuine philosopher does not want to get hold of or to possess unknown reality by forcing it onto the Procrustean bed of his pre-conceived concepts or categories. He seeks instead to get himself into the frame of mind appropriate to the revered phenomenon—one which renders him open to its summons and makes his vision clear for its beckonings. If he manages to comply perfectly with the unknown reality he will catch sight of its truth, which will release him from the chaos of delusion.

The true philosopher does not want to take conceptual possession of unknown reality, to concretize and stratify it, to put it into a straitjacket of abstractions, contrived pictorial images, or scholastic structures. Pedants with a restricted viewpoint attempt to fragment reality, calculate it, and objectify it within the strictures of factional dogmas and ideologies.

Practitioners of Dialectic do not want to take possession of Reality, rather they allow the Unknown simply to occur in the pristineness of its mystery. Instead of trying to manipulate Reality by means of our concepts we attempt to open ourselves and allow our being to become clear-visioned. In this way our spiritual essence becomes truly worthy of understanding unknown Reality and is in accord with it.

We can best realize our ongoing quest for self-improvement by participating in dialectical interchange within ourselves and with philosophers: persons who aspire to and achieve wisdom. Self-transformation occurs when a subject engages in reflection, meditation, contemplation, reasoning and dialectical interchange with others. We increase our self-awareness by becoming progressively conscious of the elements of our internal reality: self, consciousness, feelings, thoughts, reflection, aspirations, ideals, and Higher
Self. Self-transformation is a power which creates a separation between ourselves at the moment and what we aspire to become. We do not know ourselves fully until we express our inner being in thoughts and actions. We can most fully express ourselves to others who are self-aware and capable of participating in dialectical interchange.

Plato believed that life without self-awareness is not worth living. Understanding is constitutive of human existence. As Plato made clear, self-knowledge is an achievement of a very few. Most persons will not allow their desire to know its full range of freedom, so the sense of wonder often ends in blind routine. Their refusal to understand eventuates not only in the loss of reality but also in the loss of the self: intellectual and spiritual suicide. The result is the close-mindedness of the over-sophisticated intellectual or the opportunism of "practical men" who content themselves with a curious mixture of animal faith and ideological fervor.

Personal error is in part a failure to engage in interchange with others. Reality--including the opinions of others and your own conscience--can inform you of your unethical behavior. It's necessary to engage in dialectical interchange with intelligent others to realize full self-awareness. Divulgence of your personal essence requires interchange with intelligent--and sympathetic--co-participants. Only through self-expression in dialectical response to divulgence and inquiry from intelligent others, do we discover who we are.

Self-transformation includes the ability to explain how one changed from state A to B, from belief A to belief B, from assumptions A to assumptions B, from values A to values B, from process of transformation A to process of transformation B (e.g. a self-correcting process of learning). To engage in self-transformation we must possess capability in an ongoing process of self-discovery and self-betterment. My actions become fully mine when they are part of my conscious experience and they become more effectively mine when I understand precisely what I'm doing when I'm gaining understanding.

We attain self-knowledge most comprehensively in dialectical interchange by co-participants utilizing a common language of spiritual inspiration. Dialectic becomes a continuing mode of relating and interchanging with others, particularly those capable of philosophical understanding. The extra-normal element of Dialectic comes into play when participants realize that they are co-creators of ontological events and other phenomena.

"Take some more tea," the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly.
"I've had nothing yet," Alice replied in an offended tone, "so I can't take more."
"You mean you can't take less," said the Hatter: "it's very easy to take more than nothing."

"The power of elevating the highest essence of the soul to contemplation of
that which is foremost in Reality, with which we may compare the raising of that faculty which is the very light of the body to the sight of that which is brightest in the material and visible world—this power is given by comprehensive study and pursuit of the arts of Dialectic."

Plato, Commonwealth VII, 532c


2 Ibid

3 Preternatural: exceeding what is natural or ordinary, inexplicable by ordinary means

4 Anagogical: from the Greek anagein: to lift up; the word denotes any element (entity or experience) through which a person's actions, thoughts and feelings are lifted up from worldly sense experience to realize an experiential participation in the spiritual realm.

5 Constitutive: entering into the essential nature as a formative element or necessary attribute; making a thing what it is; tending or assisting to constitute; elemental, essential

6 Transformation: marked change in the appearance, form, nature, character, function, or condition of an element
In previous chapters we've discovered that Plato's mystical science of dialectic was an extraordinary kind of shared mystical experience in which Socrates served as a psychagogic midwife, overseeing the process of the divulgence of, the bringing into being of new elements: ideas, feelings, inspirations, and images.

"When you make the inner as the outer and the outer as the inner. . . then you shall enter the sovereignty of the higher realm."

Jesus of Nazareth

The Meaning and Activity of Dialectic

The Greek word dialectic (dialektos) refers to reciprocal interchange between persons or aspects of a person. One of the extraordinary elements Plato introduces is locating dialectic both in outer discourse and in inner dialogue. In Theaetetus, Plato defines thinking as:

"a talk which the soul has with itself about the objects under its consideration. . . It seems to me that the soul when it thinks is simply carrying on a discussion in which it asks itself questions and answers them itself, affirms and denies. And when it arrives at something definite, either by a gradual process or a sudden leap, when it affirms one thing consistently and without divided counsel, we call this its judgment. So, in my view, to judge is to make a statement, and a judgment is a statement which is not addressed to another person or spoken aloud, but silently addressed to oneself." [189e-190a]

In the Sophist, the Eleatic Stranger states that thinking and discourse are the same thing, except that what we call thinking is, precisely, the inward dialogue carried on by the mind with itself without spoken sound. (263e) He also asserts that there is true and false speech, that thinking is the soul's conversation with itself, that belief is the conclusion of thinking, and that what we call appearing is the blending of perception and belief. [264b]

Thinking as Inner Dialectic

According to Plato, conceiving or thinking is the conversation the soul has with itself in considering things, asking itself questions and answering them. It is possible to practice dialectic as an inner dialogue with one's soul.

Plato's written dialogues are dramatic representations of "outer dialectic," to help us learn how to create an "inner dialectic" indispensable for attaining wisdom. A dialogue
can be among any number of people, not just two, and a single person can experience dialogue within herself.

"The primary meaning of consciousness is the presence of the self to itself through operations that attain an object. The originating meaning of consciousness is the self-presence that grounds every other form of presence in human consciousness. The secondary meaning of consciousness is the mediation of self-presence through conscious acts. The tertiary meaning of consciousness pertains to the object or content of the conscious activity."

Emile J. Piscitelli, "Insight As a Theory of Knowledge: Basic Method And Metaphysics"

A number of creative artists—dramatists, philosophers, writers, performers, etc.—have expanded on Plato's concept of inner dialectic. In this chapter, we'll take a look at Boethius' inner dialogue with Lady Philosophy.

Boethius' Inner Dialogue Between Himself and Lady Philosophy

We cannot overestimate the importance of Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (480-524 CE) as the mediator of Greek philosophical learning to the Western world in the fifth century. Boethius' writings reveal a profound intellectual debt to both Plato and the Neoplatonists. The essential format of his The Emboldenment of Philosophy can best be described as a Platonic prose poem showing that deep philosophical understanding can facilitate the return of the soul to its origin in God. The Platonic doctrines of Recollection and the Ascent of the Soul are combined and interpreted in terms of Plotinus' ascent of the soul to its original home.

During the Dark Ages in Europe, acquaintance with the works of Plato was at second or even third hand, through the writings of authors such as Macrobius, Martianus Capella, Augustine, Boethius, Calcidius' translation of the Timaeus, and John Scotus Erigena. The most important contribution in the vernacular was provided by the late ninth century reworking of Boethius' De consolatione Philosophiae.

In political life Boethius stood up for justice at his own risk. He had persuaded Theodoric the Great (d. 526), the Ostrogothic king of Italy, to remit by two-thirds the tax his nephew Odoacer had imposed on the farmers of Campania. He had criticized the Goths Conigastus and Trigulla, and he had sided with the culture of the larger Roman Empire against the Gothicizing circle of Cyprian. Theodoric was Arian, whereas the Byzantine emperor was orthodox in faith and had started to persecute Arians. Boethius was falsely charged with having treasonous designs against Theodoric.

Boethius was imprisoned in Pavia three hundred miles from Rome while a sentence was passed against him and confirmed by the Senate, probably under pressure from
Theodoric. While Boethius was in captivity and deprived of the use of his library, he wrote *The Emboldenment of Philosophy*. In 524 CE a strong cord was tied so tightly around his head that his eyes bulged out; then he was beaten with a club until he died. Shortly after that his father-in-law, the senator Symmachus, was taken from Rome to Ravenna and also executed.

*The Emboldenment of Philosophy* became one of the most popular books throughout the Middle Ages. It was translated into Old, Middle and Elizabethan English by Alfred the Great, Chaucer, and Queen Elizabeth respectively.

Boethius used the literary form of an internal dialogue in a manner only distantly similar to Augustine’s *Confessions*. The inner dialogue is between Lady Philosophy and Boethius, representing aspects of his soul. The narrative movement of *The Emboldenment of Philosophy* constitutes Boethius’ search for transformation and self-understanding. Boethius combined verse and alternating dialogue between him and Lady Philosophy, organizing his narrative into different arguments and different stages of his spiritual healing process. Lady Philosophy, a personification allegory, was used by Boethius as a foil for his thoughts, as she brings into the dialectical process others who have pondered philosophy.

Philosophy diagnoses Boethius' spiritual condition, telling him that "it is not simply a case of your being banished far from your home; you have wandered away from yourself." Lady Philosophy completes her "diagnosis" of Boethius by asking him a series of questions to discover his spiritual state. Through these questions, she finds that the major cause of his illness is that he has forgotten his true nature and therefore he has forgotten the "means by which the world is governed." Through his dialogue with Lady Philosophy, Boethius gains an understanding that his disillusionment is the result of his limited human perspective: he will receive consolation when he is able to change his focus from the human viewpoint to the Divine perspective.

Lady Philosophy helps Boethius to gain a more profound understanding of Fortune's role is his life, accepting the fundamental problem of change that Fortune presents. Lady Philosophy personifies Fortune as an unfaithful, inconstant woman, the bearer of wealth, fame, glory, and other things that bring only temporary happiness. Fortune fosters desires which produce human anxiety and disorder. Thus, the more an individual is able to free himself from ephemeral desires the closer he moves towards the eternal source of serenity. Philosophy explains to Boethius that the power of love is responsible for preserving cosmic harmony and order despite constant change. Love is also responsible for "weaving the holy knot of marriage's pure love" and for "solidifying the bond of friendship." Lady Philosophy explains that humans have the freedom to partake of this harmony by loving rightly and thus moving closer to the ultimate goal of divine happiness.

With Lady Philosophy's assistance, Boethius is able to see that God is the essence of happiness and that supreme happiness is "identical with supreme divinity." Boethius
achieves a breakthrough in his sense of himself as he understands that because humans can obtain beatitude they are able to become divine. Boethius achieves repose by discerning that human experience takes place between the human (mortal) realm and that of divinity (immortality), and that some part of the human soul does not die. For Boethius to participate in divinity, he must remember his true nature and God's true nature as a source of supreme good. Philosophy consoles Boethius by explaining that although God governs the universe, he has given humans free will—the right to choose between goodness and immortality or evil and mortality.

Boethius is able to see that it is his affirmation of selfhood and confidence in the Divine good that allow him to forsake the anxieties of his imprisonment and focus on the divine. In his *Embollement of Philosophy*, Boethius created an internal drama of self-examination, communicating with his Higher Consciousness (Lady Philosophy) and thus achieving divine consolation through his love of Wisdom.

Boethius is one of the great martyrs within or associated with the Perennial Tradition, which includes Socrates, Jesus, Bruno, Servetus, and many others. Boethius composed the *Embollement* while sitting in his prison-cell awaiting a ghastly execution. The absence of any explicit reference to Christianity in the *Embollement* poses interesting questions, showing that great philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Boethius can deal with ultimate spiritual issues without the sham "consolation" of an ecclesiastical religion. Boethius' inner dialectic clearly shows that there is an interior Higher Consciousness which has to do with an ancient, Perennialist spirituality that is quite different from the pseudo-spirituality that sacerdotal Christianity embraces.

In Boethius' *Embollement*, Philosophy moves from persuasion and rational argument to an inspired use of poetry to bridge the gap between the sense-imprisoned human and divine Wisdom. Lady Philosophy ends with this statement: "Eternity is the entire and perfect possession of endless life at a single instant."

Lady Philosophy says that we must not assume that the common mind-set can put us in touch with Reality. The ordinary world view is like a person who has lost his ability to see—and has also lost his awareness that he has lost his sight. He thinks that his blindness is perception and wants to force all people to his standard of ignorant blindness.

Philosophy presents us with an exceptionally challenging concept: that evil and viciousness is a kind of disease of the soul, like illness in the body. And, she tells us," if sickness of the body is not something we hate, but rather regard with sympathy, we have much more reason to pity those whose minds are afflicted with wickedness, a thing worse than any sickness." Thus, it is a waste of time to hate evil people.

Boethius is emboldened by Lady Philosophy to reconstruct his world-view and live with true equanimity. In a similar vein, as we transform our perspective of life and the Divine, we achieve the "peace that passeth understanding."

"Therefore, even though things may seem confused and discordant to you, because you cannot discern the order that governs them, nevertheless everything is governed
by its own proper order directing all things toward the good."

1 Boethius' writing is often mistranslated The Consolation of Philosophy, but the word "consolation" is too passive and timid a word for what transpires in the book. Even if we consider the word used in Boethius' original Latin, consolatio, this means "encouragement," "reassurance," and "amelioration," and the related Latin word consolido means "to make firm."
Chapter Twelve: Reading As Dialectical Interchange

Discerning reading and study of instructional material within the Perennial Tradition enables serious students to enter the initial stages of the mystical state of dialectical interchange. The specially designed elements within Perennialist material make it possible for diligent students to gain the understanding and skill necessary to unlock transformative experiences.

Reading and study can be understood as a type manifesting in all of life: we "read" and cognize our experience as it unfolds to us and we "study" and meditate on experience to gain understanding of it. Life, then, is an ongoing dialectical interchange between us and an unknown reality appearing, emerging, being released into existence. Persons working within the Perennial Tradition view all life as providing "learning experiences" which we are to "read" and "study" (discern and investigate) to gain understanding that becomes the basis for transformation of ourselves and our world.

A Higher Intelligence speaks to me through my experience of reading illuminating material. The material expands my consciousness, allowing me to understand elements I had not understood before. This form of dialectical interchange through reading involves the material acting on my consciousness to produce new meanings and new awareness. My consciousness interacts with the material to arrive at new concepts. The new understanding is a joint creation of a previously unknown reality—the meanings immanent in the material—and my desire to achieve deeper comprehension. I realize the newly created understanding is only partially the creation of my consciousness, because it is something I was previously unaware of—and grasp its meanings progressively through repeated subsequent readings. And it has the reality of a 'message' expressed through me which I then can, if I attain the proper altitude of mind, 'interpret' to others through precise thought and exact phrasing: expressing the new awareness in appropriate and cogent terms. It is the experience of a mystical unifying of separate realities or modalities into a common, creative manifestation.

If I am able to serve as a clear channel for the 'message' transmitted through the dialectical interchange of my meditative reading of illuminating material to produce a dynamic written manifestation, then a new 'message' can later be received by a prepared reader (including myself) utilizing my manifestation as the counterpoint for his or her dialectical reading interchange."

The significance and importance of oral and written Perennialist teaching material and activity is the creation of new understanding on the part of the student. Instructional material is not produced for its own sake, merely to say that we have educational concepts and exercises. The sole purpose of Perennialist teaching material and procedures is to enable students to gain increased understanding, which allows for transformative interchange between the material, the teacher, and the student.
Participation in dialectical interchange is possible in several different ways:

- Engaging in interpersonal interchange with other qualified persons who've carried out the necessary prerequisites.
- Joining in interpersonal Dialectical interchange via the Internet as a procedure within an introductory study program
- Participating in Dialectical interchange through meditation and contemplation
- Engaging in inner dialectics, as we explored in a previous chapter
- Engaging in dialectic interchange as a constituent of being: communication with, reflection and action upon the terrestrial and spiritual domains in order to understand and transform ourselves and Reality
- Engaging with transformative material through personal study and assimilation as delineated in this chapter

"How were the texts studied?"

"By constant reading so that the different levels of meaning should be absorbed gradually. They were not read to be 'understood' as you understand the term but to be absorbed into the very texture of your conscious being and your inner self. In the west the intellectual teaches that you must understand a thing to profit from it. Sufi lore places no reliance upon such a clumsy thing as your superficial ability. The baraka seeps in, often despite you, rather than being forced to wait upon the doorstep until your 'intellect' permits it to filter through in an attenuated form."

Rafael Lefort, *The Teachers of Gurdjieff*

Transformative Perennialist Teaching Material

One of the earliest transmissions of the Perennial Tradition came through the Hermetic Corpus. The composite figure of Hermes represents a force in the terrestrial realm which communicates divine meaning to humans. The image of Hermes is associated with the function of transmuting what is beyond ordinary human understanding into a
mystical form that advanced human intelligence can understand and utilize for personal transformation.

The Hebrew Wisdom tradition—an early embodiment of the Perennial Tradition—referred to the mystical element in transformative teaching material in relation to various levels of exegesis and interpretation:

- **Peshat**: Literal meaning; the contextual, philological level
- **Remez**: Allegorical meaning; cross-reference to other texts; rational or philosophical level
- **Derash**: Moral or homiletic meaning
- **Sod**: Mystical or anagogical meaning

The initial letters of these four words form the acronym PaRDeS: transliterally interpreted as a walled garden or Paradise. Perennialist teachers refer to the wall around the garden as the "malbush" or "garments" of the text, concealing the esoteric meaning. One of the preeminent works of Sufi mystical poetry is that by Hakim Sanai entitled *The Walled Garden of Truth*.

> "Words are embodiments of States, And Concretizations of meaning."

Ibn Al Arabi, Perennialist Teacher

A Perennialist teacher's occult knowledge enables her to encode veiled, multiple meanings and impacts in the material she produces. Dante pointed out that transcendent writings are polysemous—possessing multiple meanings and utilizing fables, imagery, emblems, and iconographic devices.

Perennialist teachers know precisely what kind of material will produce the desired effect on a particular type of student. They are aware of the extra-ordinary powers within certain types of instructional material or procedures. Select teaching stories are able to convey, in a subtle way, messages which could not be made clear through ordinary declaratory discourse. Teachers choose special teaching events that contain "impacts" capable of penetrating the conditioned responses of a student's mind, enabling, even obliging him to see aspects of himself and his world in an unexpected light.

There are five aspects in the development of transformative teaching material:

1. The Perennialist teacher opening herself to inspiration from higher sources
2. The teacher's selective envisioning of how to express concepts and orchestrate exercises
3. The teacher's creation of the oral and written expressions of the inspired message

4. Teachers' and advanced students' rediscovery, adaptation, and preservation of the human wealth of current and earlier teaching material

5. The student's appreciative discernment and assimilation of the writings and procedures

"Appreciation is as definite a contribution to whole creation as any of the other qualities which seem to us the peculiar property of genius. Appreciation too works in the substance of thought, and therefore joins hands as co-worker with the original creative impulse."

Stewart Edward White. *The Job of Living*

In this chapter we're exploring the last of those aspects: appreciative discernment of inspired manifestations. In this instance we're examining how reflective study of Perennialist material unlocks the veiled meanings and effects which savants implant in their instructional writings.

We can refer to the first three aspects of the development of teaching material listed above as the work of a "receiving station." A person fulfilling this function must learn to allow the flow-through of inspiration that eventuates in a higher expression. The function we're investigating in this chapter can be termed "conceiving station."

"The conceiving station must not only comprehend what is said, but he must on his own hook develop implications as they occur to his habit of mind, and report them back and discuss them. Many times these contributions are negatived or drastically modified by the communicator; in which case they are valuable as clearing misconception." 6

An effective "conceiving station" restates the concepts within the instructional material in his own terms, which indicates whether he has or has not fully comprehended what is being conveyed. Going beyond that, he is able to carry to conclusion premises only adumbrated in the teaching material.

The following example explains how interpreting words in an enlightened manner possesses a power in its own right. If a heedless student reads the word "emblem" and assumes it means merely "a badge or design that functions as a symbol," the potential force inherent in the word "emblem" is unrealized.

An advanced student would interpret "emblem" to mean: "an allegorical picture often inscribed with a motto supplemental to the visual image with which it forms a single
unit of meaning." The latter rendering of the word "emblem" is higher--more revelatory of transcendent meaning--than the first. Interested readers will find it beneficial to contemplate how a Perennialist teacher might so locate the word "emblem" or an emblem itself in an arcane context which would imbue the word or image with a higher, transformative signification.

"When we begin to look at the material of the hermetic tradition we are quickly struck by the elaborate and beautiful emblematic engravings especially from the late 16th and early 17th centuries, such as those of De Bry, Merian and others, illustrating the works of Robert Fludd, Michael Maier, Mylius, Khunrath, etc, which now seem almost mandatory for inclusion in today's popular books on the 'occult' and related themes.

"Only rarely in such present day popular books are the symbolic contents of these emblems addressed by any meaningful or sensitive commentary, and they are all too often used merely as a form of decoration, or to pad out an otherwise inadequate text . . .

"I believe these emblems are too important to be dismissed merely as fine examples of symbolic engravings. Indeed, if we work with them with any sensitivity, we will come to recognise that they possess a kind of inner life, a numinous quality. They are not merely symbolic keys to unlock the mysteries of hermeticism, but can be experienced as bearing a kind of living spiritual force that can still work in our souls today if we are prepared to contemplate them in the right way . . ."

Adam McLean, "Emblematic Meditation"

Study as an entrée to dialectical interchange involves developing appreciative discernment of the revelation of a higher, inspirational source in a particular manifestation. An inspired manifestation is only realized--made real, completed, and brought to fruition--by appreciative, discerning recipients. Those recipients can include the teacher himself and readers or viewers of his creations. Transformative teaching material such as Boethius' The Emboldenment of Philosophy, for example, is only actualized and consummated by its being appreciated, understood, and enjoyed by a discerning reader.

A reader who merely passes over the words of such a book, without genuine comprehension, leaves the teaching in an unfinished state in regards to his own experience and to the actualization of the material. If the reader, out of egotism or scholastic puffery, injects spurious, extraneous meanings into the content, he creates a perversion of his own design totally unrelated to the real teaching which Boethius created. The essential teaching, containing multiple meanings, cascading associations, and profound metaphysical dimensions, is available to the appreciative, discerning reader who has prepared himself to
"All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act. This becomes even more obvious when posterity gives its final verdict and sometimes rehabilitates forgotten artists."

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968 CE), French artist.

The Dialectic of Reading Transformative Material

All Perennialist teaching material utilizes the arcane anagogical faculty of language. Literature, architecture, music, and art cast in the anagogical mode have the power to lift up a person's actions, thoughts and feelings from worldly sense impressions to activate experiential participation in the spiritual realm. An anagogical experience is one that elevates the mind above the world of appearances to contemplation of the divine order.

Through appropriate instruction, purposeful students learn to read and meditate on the inspired words of ancient sages such as Hermes, Plato, Jesus, Iamblicus, Plotinus, Tauler, and others to understand the reality of a Higher World of Ideas in which kindred souls commune. Jacob Boehme speaks of how the Higher Selves of the like-minded, whether near or far from each other, become "fellow-members, friends and relations." To gain higher understanding, students must make assiduous effort to approach Perennialist material in an entirely new manner:

- A frame of mind which allows for the releasing of the material's intrinsic dynamic
- In the understanding that they are learning to activate a new faculty of discernment
- Contemplate how these ideas, concepts, and exercises were received by the Perennialist teacher as inspiration and intuition.
- Consider how the teacher would have had to organize the ideas, concepts, and exercises to produce the appropriate dynamic effect.
- Test to see if you're grasping the deeper meaning of the material by producing your own interpretation and receiving feedback. After reading and studying the material,
explain in oral or written interchange with your teacher how you understand the material by re-phrasing its meaning and indicating what implications you judge it has.

"I know what I want to get over . . . and I express it. But how can I tell how much I have conveyed unless I get a reflection back from your minds. What can I read of your comprehension from blank silence?"

Stewart Edward White, *The Unobstructed Universe*, 1940, p. 62

The specific aspects of your response to the instructional material allows the teacher to evaluate your progress and provide you feedback as to whether or not you've understood the meaning and dynamic of the material.

Along with your teacher's feedback, you will know if you are achieving and activating this new faculty of discernment or not through these indicators:

- The material you study suddenly or slowly begins to seem entirely new to you—as though you've never read it before or at least never understood it before. You begin to have "insight" into its real, deeper meaning.
- You begin to understand what you should *do*: what specific material you need to continue reading and studying and what projects you need to carry out.
- You begin to receive new ideas through inspiration or intuition.
- When re-reading a philosophical masterpiece, you experience it is an entirely new book. You can hardly believe that there is all this startling new meaning in a work you believed you had previously so thoroughly, so exhaustively mined. Of course, the newness is in your capability of comprehension which has evolved and expanded in the interim.
- This is so much the case, that one test of your continuing spiritual growth is the new and enlarged meaning you uncover at each reading of a masterpiece. If a philosophical masterwork seems to have no new meaning, if it seems stale and lackluster, confined to meaning you had previously discovered, then there is likely some blockage present in your spiritual development.
- You'll begin recognizing areas of personal transformation taking place.

**Non-Transformative Reading of Non-Transformative Material**
We're examining a very unusual kind of study of a unique sort of material—not ordinary casual perusal of common content. Recently, there has sprung up a new academic area of controversy, with the usual so-called experts fighting toe to toe over totally inane concepts such as deconstructionism, post-totalitarian readers, new-criticism, functionalism, inscribed readers, and other species of meaningless jargon. Just to get a sense of the senselessness of this nonsense:

"Meaning does not reside in the text but in the experience of the reader. A sentence is an event, something that happens to and with the participation of the reader . . . Experience is immediately compromised the moment you say anything about it." 7

Leaving this barren field to its scholastic jousting tournaments, we recollect that there has been a long-standing tradition in organized religions concerned with the reading and study of Scripture. Dogmatic religions teach that a true believer should read the received Scripture because it is perceived to be "the word of God." The disciple has the duty of reading the one holy, sacrosanct, unquestionable Truth—to learn what he is to believe and do. He is not to question what the Scripture says, just memorize and follow its dictates submissively and mindlessly. In regressive, conventionalized religions, penitents are often discouraged from reading the scriptures for themselves, forced merely to accept the "interpretations" of religious autocrats.

While some Perennialist savants have found inspiration in orthodox scriptures, most have focused their studies on the extensive material created by Perennialist sages for their own times and needs. Many of these Perennialist masterpieces have become the literary foundation of their respective cultures, as in Persia. A few rather more broad-minded Christian contemplatives such as Isaac of Nineveh, an East Syrian writer of the seventh century, held that the reading of Scripture is not so much study of the Biblical text for cognitive purposes, but rather as a means for direct converse and mystical encounter with God and insight into the depths of the divine reality. Isaac spoke of the reading of Scripture as the primary means of spiritual transformation.

However, most reading of scripture within orthodox religions has been merely for the purpose of propagandizing and conditioning penitents, with any questionable heretical books promptly tossed on the burning pyres or listed on the index of books forbidden to be read.

When the teacher had the students read the material in the book aloud to the class and then explain it, one girl slammed down her book. "We’re not supposed to be able to read this rubbish and understand it." she shouted. "It's your job to teach it to us!"

"Listen," the teacher replied, as calmly as she could manage, "Within a year you will be sitting alone in a study bedroom in some college, and in the room with you
will be a pile of books." She paused while the class contemplated this very real possibility. "There will be no one else in the room. Unless by then you can open books and read them, with understanding, you might as well not attend college."

Understanding is the capability of explaining concepts and activities to yourself. It is aided by explaining to others and studying your own explanation. Explanation refers to a product as well as a process.

**Gaining Self-Knowledge**

Perennialist teaching material possesses the dynamic of enabling diligent students to attain understanding of what elements in their own intellectual and moral makeup are effective or ineffective.

Transformative material has the nature of a philosophical Rorschach test: it reveals the quality and character of the reader or student. Perennialist teachings constitute a fathomless depth into which unmindful persons can put their own misconceptions, dogmas, prejudices, and rationalizations. Responses to transformative material, then, tell us primarily about the student, not the teachings.

Most persons approach Perennialist material with debilitating personal qualities and tendencies, making it impossible for them to study effectively or make necessary changes in their character. The most enervating aspect of their personalities is usually egomania, coupled with an inability to see their own faults and a lack of desire to become aware of their defects.

"To ask of the teacher: 'Give me your higher knowledge, but leave me my customary emotions, feelings, and thoughts,' would be an impossible demand. In this case the gratification of curiosity and desire for knowledge would be the only motive. When pursued in such a spirit, however, higher knowledge can never be attained."

Rudolf Steiner, "The Conditions of Esoteric Training"

You must be able and willing to examine yourself and correct personal defects if you're to succeed in the study of Perennialist material. This is something which you must initially do primarily on your own, because if a teacher has to continually point out your deficiencies, it indicates that you aren't serious about self-study or self-improvement.

We must avoid plunging heedlessly and precipitately into studying Perennialist material, assuming that a superficial reading of the words will provide insight.
Approaching each teaching element with the necessary sense of respect and anticipation, we learn to activate the special dynamic the Perennialist savant created within her material that allows for specific transformative effects in the reader.

**Transformative Interchange Through Study**

As we practice the search for and love of deeper wisdom, we begin to get a sense that reading and studying Perennialist material involves a definite interchange between ourselves, the teachings, the study situation, and the larger Unitary Reality. First, we find that just the right material comes into our purview at the right time, containing precisely what we need for our learning relative to our present level of understanding and activity. We begin to get a sense that the dialectic interchange resulting from assiduous study involves a different kind of experience than merely reading an essay or a book in a heedless manner, simply to pass the time.

Those who cannot commit to the prerequisites for this kind of study waste the dynamic of the interchange—and waste their own time as well. Dialectical interchange through thoughtful reading requires new kinds of responses and initiatives: not just perusing the material, but thinking, reflecting, contemplating, focusing on what one is feeling, and evaluating one's responses and reactions.

As you read and study in this manner, you learn to interact with the ideas and meanings of the instructional material, gaining new understanding of concepts and processes, placing that fresh comprehension back into the context of the material to allow it to produce yet additional insights, in a constantly ongoing process of interchange. You discover that the surpassing forces within Perennialist teaching material create playful coruscations of luminosity that seem to bear within them the seeds of their own transcendence.

The linguistic and artistic elements within Perennialist teaching material strain against their conceptual bounds; the anagogical forces overpower the ordinary meanings, allowing us to ascend to an actual participation in a divine Beyond. The evocative and transformative power of the material far outstrips the merely informative capacity and we move into higher realms of meaning and effect.

Our highest realization comes with the awareness that Perennialist material is a divine bestowal. In his *Ion*, Plato made it clear that artists and savants receive their ideas and meanings from the Higher Realm.

". . . God takes their ordinary state of consciousness from artists and savants when he communicates through them, as He does with prophets and diviners, so that we who hear should know they are not the ones who speak those verses that are of such high value . . . that God himself is the one who speaks through them to us."
I am using the word "type" in a very specific manner, referring to "the general form, character, or structure distinguishing a particular kind, group, or class of beings [events,] or objects; hence, a pattern or model after which something is made." [Oxford English Dictionary]

2 Dialectical interchange: A constituent of being
A shared mystical experience; entering into the dialectical frame of mind, participants in interpersonal dialectical interchange enter a higher state of consciousness, allowing psychic material to flow through them; they fly by the seat of their pants; they don't follow a script; they gain union with their Higher Self and create new understanding by the interaction and coalescence of ideas from all active participants in the interchange.

3 Dialectical interchange is, among other things, an instructional and screening process within the Perennial Tradition preparatory study program. This procedure can appropriately be made available only to those who have completed the preparatory phase, have applied for acceptance to the introductory program, and have been provisionally admitted to that instructional and screening procedure. The clearest analogy we can make is to liken this process to the instructional procedure for naval special forces when they're trained to live and breathe under water with special equipment. Dialectical interchange is, similarly, preparation for living in an entirely different "atmosphere" than ordinary consciousness by learning to use "special faculties." It would not be advisable for persons to participate in this instructional procedure unless they were engaged in the entire study program. Dialectical interchange, by itself, without prior and ongoing instruction in other critical areas, either eventuates in merely a screening-out incident (the student demonstrating that he is incapable of introductory study) or embroils the person in areas of potential danger.

4 Engage: to involve oneself or become occupied with; participate; to interlock or cause to interlock; to pledge or promise; to attract and hold the attention of; to draw into

5 Anagogical: from the Greek anagein: to lift up; the word denotes any entity or experience through which a prepared person's actions, thoughts and feelings are lifted up from worldly sensations to realize an experiential participation in the spiritual realm. The aspirant must possess the correct respect for Higher Knowledge for this phenomenon to occur.

6 Stewart Edward White, The Unobstructed Universe, 1940, p. 62

7 This particular bit of inanity comes from the pen of Stanley Fish in his essay "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," New Literary History, 123-62, 1970
Chapter Thirteen: Dialectical Interpersonal Relationships

We've previously explored various aspects of the relationships involved in dialectical interchange. In this chapter we'll examine the special features of the interchange involved in genuine interpersonal and political-economic relationships. Such relationships are part of life, which is an ongoing dialectical interchange between humans and an unknown reality which appears, emerges, and becomes released into existence.

For those capable of philosophical understanding, Dialectic becomes the accustomed mode of exploring, speaking, understanding, and sharing ideas and feelings in interpersonal relationships. The extra-normal element of Dialectic comes into play when persons in relationships realize that they are co-creators of life-situations, personalities, events, and other phenomena such as artistic and literary works.

Negative, Inauthentic Relationships

Before we explore the extraordinary features of genuine relationships, we need to examine what constitutes inauthentic relationships in two different arenas:

1. Interpersonal relationships

2. Political-economic relationships

If you want to examine ideas and behaviors that are totally opposite to the concept of genuine relationships as defined in this chapter, you can go to the large number of Websites of persons who advocate male dominance over women.

A major cause of the derangement of the social-political-economic elements of contemporary society are our debased interpersonal relationship structures, ideologies, and behaviors. So-called mental health professionals, unfortunately, are as psychologically and morally afflicted as their victim/patients.

"The sicknesses of the soul are sicknesses of relation."

Martin Buber
The Brainwashing Establishment Sees Its Chance

Perpetuating their illegitimacy, the psychiatric-psychological establishment recently tried to create a new scam—“Relational Disorder”—to increase the number of counterfeit "illnesses" they can treat at patients' and insurance companies' expense.

Today, shrinks claim that 48% of people between the ages of 15 and 54 have some form of mental illness. Before psychiatrists and psychologists manufactured the myth of mental illness, the figure used to be 0.1% of all ages in the mid-1800s.

The first edition (1952) of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, the shrinks’ definitive list of mental illnesses, identified 112 disorders; the fourth edition in 1994 listed 370 mental illnesses. It's reasonable to question if such an exponential rise in mental disorder could occur within just two generations.

The Citizens Commission on Human Rights (CCHR), a psychiatric watchdog group, recently published a study in the journal Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics revealing the incestuous financial relationship between the pharmaceutical industry and the American Psychiatric Association’s (APA) “billing bible,” The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). For over a decade CCHR has called on governments to eliminate the DSM as a valid diagnostic manual for insurance reimbursement or for the basis of any legislation or court testimony. “It is an unreliable, pseudoscientific document with enormous power to damage lives, while being used to rake in $76 billion a year in international psychiatric drug sales,” CCHR’s national U.S. president Bruce Wiseman stated.

How quixotic and fraudulent is the DSM? Robert Spitzer, chairman of the DSM-IV committee, thought up “self-defeating personality disorder” on a fishing trip and persuaded his colleagues to include the disorder in DSM-IV. The Manual doesn't distinguish between mental and physical “disorders.” If a child keeps missing the ball in baseball practice and this upsets the child, the parent or the coach, the child is said to have “developmental coordination disorder” and is administered Ritalin or Prozac instead of being coached.

Among many scams, "Social Anxiety Disease (SAD)" was invented by psychiatrists to give shyness a “scientific label” in 1997. Fifty mentions were made in the media of this SAD condition in 1997 and 1998, but in 1999, one billion media mentions occurred. Ninety-six percent of these also happened to say that Paxil was the only FDA-approved medication that could treat SAD. The Washington Post reported on July 16, 2001, that the manufacturer of Paxil, Glaxo SmithKline, had paid Cohn and Wolfe, a public relations agency, to coordinate a multimillion-dollar marketing and advertising campaign, to "inform thousands of people who previously did not know they were suffering from the disorder, and spurring many to seek needed help."
Senator Bill Frist tried to legitimize with a bill in 2005 that would define "political paranoia" as a mental disorder, paving the way for individuals who suffer from paranoid delusions regarding voter fraud, political persecution and FBI surveillance to receive Medicare reimbursement for any psychiatric treatment they receive.

Rick Smith, a spokesman for Senator Frist, said that "If you're still convinced that President Bush won the election because Republicans figured out a way to hack into electronic voting machines, you've obviously got a problem. If we can figure out a way to ease your suffering by getting you into therapy and onto medication, that's something that we hope the entire 109th Congress will support." Fortunately, the bill did not go through.

The New Ordering Principle of Criminal Violence

It's completely understandable why the perverse manipulators of our American culture present a unified TV-movie-music-radio image of the detached, aggressive, self-assertive low-brow as the model to which the "cool" person should conform. There's not much need to divide and conquer when you have egomaniacs fighting each other for dominance, because they have no capability for cooperation or unified action whatsoever. When there is no sense of consensual order in society--as is now the case--then the only organizing mechanism must be brute force.

When people no longer live according to collaborative laws or rational principles such as personal integrity, but instead operate according to the whims and dictates of an outlaw junta that has seized and maintained American executive power through coup d'etat and vote rigging, then we're subsisting under the anarchy of organized crime. You no longer need be amazed that criminals are celebrated in TV series and movies--with reruns of the Godfather series shown almost every night and the final episode of the Sopranos subjected to ludicrous detailed scrutiny--because criminality and corruption are the new "ordering principles" of American culture.

The Derangement of Political-Economic Relationships

In today's world, the relationships that go to make up the essence of a human being have been completely perverted and twisted by the vulture capitalism structure of economic exploitation of workers by owners of the means of production (capitalists). The very fact that a person is alive should mean that he has the right to life, liberty, health, and employment. As viewers of Michael Moore's movie "Sicko" have learned, most other Western nations provide health, employment, and retirement benefits to their citizens as a matter of course, whereas people in the cabal-dominated United States not only lack health care but also suffer from globalization-induced unemployment and the ongoing destruction of our Constitutional liberties.
"A new society is possible only if, in the process of developing it, a new human being also develops, or in more modest terms, if a fundamental change occurs in contemporary Man's character structure."

Erich Fromm, To Have Or To Be?

Relationships As the Front Line of the "Revolutionary Struggle"

The real front line of "revolutionary struggle" for a commonwealth where "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" is complete revision of our patterns of relationship. Most people in today's world are "relationship cripples," totally incapable of initiating or sustaining even a single reciprocally satisfying and fulfilling relationship. We could not hope to create a genuine commonwealth until we've created persons who are capable of genuine reciprocity, cooperation, and consensus.

A culture is essentially a consensual reality created by the interpersonal relations human beings establish with one another through ritualized practices and agreed principles. Earlier in the history of the United States we recognized practices and principles of personal integrity, rule of law not men, and some degree of rule of the people through their elected representative. Prior to and following the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a criminal cabal has systematically destroyed all those rational, positive ordering structures and replaced them with a criminal, totalitarian police state.

"The realm of freedom . . . cannot consist of anything else but of the fact that socialized man, the associated producers, regulate their interchange with nature rationally, bring it under the common control, instead of being ruled by it as by some blind power; that they accomplish their task with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most adequate to their human nature and most worthy of it." 4

Part of what will constitute the "new man" is the clear realization that the current economic and political relationships—the structures of power and control—are not part of the fabric of reality but man-made ordinances. Over the centuries, capitalism and dictatorial political-economic rule have been made to appear as the outcome of natural laws, the only possible ways in which humans could order society. Two pernicious dogmas accompany this false view of human life:

* "The suffering of the workers as well as the destruction of an ever-increasing number of smaller enterprises for the sake of the growth of ever larger corporations was an
economic necessity that one might regret, but that one had to accept as if it were the
outcome of a natural law."  

"The very qualities that the system required of human beings--egotism, selfishness, and
greed--were innate in human nature; hence, not only the system but human nature itself
fostered them."  

We create the "new man" by helping people worldwide to realize that capitalism
and dictatorial rule fashion humans in the debased pattern of egomaniacs: persons
exclusively driven by self-interest and greed.

"To be an egoist refers not only to my behavior but to my character. It means: that
I want everything for myself; that possessing, not sharing, gives me pleasure; that I
must become greedy because if my aim is having, I am more the more I have; that
I must feel antagonistic toward all others: my customers whom I want to deceive,
my competitors whom I want to destroy, my workers whom I want to exploit. I can
never be satisfied, because there is no end to my wishes; I must be envious of those
who have more and afraid of those who have less."

Erich Fromm, To Have Or To Be?

The Lethality of Deranged Relationships

We must overcome the evil of capitalistic egomania not only because it brings about
the perversion of humans into deadly antagonists in a battle for life or death but because it
leads to two other lethal outcomes:

1. It makes humans progressively stupid and incapable of effective functioning
   "Private property has made us so stupid and partial that an object is only ours when we
have it, when it exists for us as capital or when it is directly eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited,
etc., in short, utilized in some way . . . Thus all the physical and intellectual senses have
been replaced by the simple alienation of all these senses; the sense of having."  

2. It leads to class warfare and the ultimate breakdown of society.
   "That the having mode and the resulting greed necessarily lead to interpersonal
antagonism and strife holds true for nations as it does for individuals. For as long as
nations are composed of people whose main motivation is having and greed, they cannot
help waging war. They necessarily covet what another nation has, and attempt to get what
they want by war, economic pressure, or threats."  

In the last analysis, it's absolutely essential that we reconstitute our interpersonal
and economic-political relationship patterns, because our very lives depend on it.
"The need for profound human change emerges not only as an ethical or religious demand, not only as a psychological demand arising from the pathogenic nature of our present social character, but also as a condition for the sheer survival of the human race. Right living is no longer only the fulfillment of an ethical or religious demand. For the first time in history the physical survival of the human race depends on a radical change of the human heart. However, a change of the human heart is possible only to the extent that drastic economic and social changes occur that give the human heart the chance for change and the courage and vision to achieve it."  

Because society with its developed organization exercises a hitherto unknown power over Man, Man's dependency on it has grown to a degree that he almost has ceased to live a mental (geistig) existence of his own . . . Thus we have entered a new Middle Ages. By a general act of will freedom of thought has been put out of function, because many give up thinking as free individuals, and are guided by the collective to which they belong . . . With the sacrifice of independence of thought we have--and how could it be otherwise--lost faith in truth. Our intellectual emotional life is disorganized. The overorganization of our public affairs culminated in the organization of thoughtlessness."

**Breaking Out of Deranged Relationships**

As an exercise in understanding, consider who you think might have been the author of the statement in the text box immediately above, Karl Marx, Erich Fromm, Friedrich Engels, who? Re-read the passage and reflect on who might express such a sentiment. It might provide a clue if I were to tell you that the author of this view was a famous musicologist who began his analysis of modern culture about 1900 and later served as a medical missionary in Africa. Implausibly, the person who saw that modern capitalist culture was leading to the total breakdown of independent thought and respect for truth was Albert Schweitzer.

As long as we allow others to define us as:
- commodities
- inferior because not monetarily wealthy
- weak because not a part of the power elite

then our being is that of a mere part of a larger whole.

The whole can be a culture, a nation state, an ideological group, or what have you. When we define ourselves in terms of our:
- sphere of awareness
- sphere of interest
- sphere of involvement
- sphere of empathy
• sphere of self-development
then our being expands to encompass more of the larger whole.

Once we attain the understanding that we are, in essence, in a unified state with the
One, then we can view ourselves as both a part of the One and a manifestation of the One.  
It then becomes merely a matter of perspective: seeing ourselves as a part of the Divine or
the Divine expressing itself through us. In Boehme's words, God seeing and hearing
through us.

The Ontology of Entities and Relationships

To understand the transcendent quality of dialectical interchange in interpersonal
relationships between persons within the Perennial Tradition, we must explore the
ontology, physics, and sociology of relationships.

Ontology, the investigation of being, has been pursued in terms of:

• Entities: objects, persons, things, events, conditions
• Relationships

These two approaches to being were previously thought to be polar opposites, but
with the advent of quantum physics and field theory, they're now considered merely two
ways of approaching the investigation of reality.

Quantum theory views entities as no more--or less--real than the relationships
associated with and between those entities. An entity is defined by its relationships to other
entities; it is defined by locating it in time and space, which is to say by defining its
relationship to other entities. One physicist put it this way: "All of the well-established laws
of physics may well be nothing but consequences of the existence of stable objects whose
forms are sets of spatial relations between formless objects." 11

"If you do not get schwindlig [dizzy] sometimes when you think about these things then
you have not really understood it [quantum theory]."

Neils Bohr, Quantum Physicist

When science looked closely at matter--which is said to be the constituent of entities--
it found particles which can only be defined in relation to other elements. In the core of even
the most solid-looking matter, separateness of being dissolves. All that remains are
relationships extending curiously throughout space and time. These connections were
predicted by quantum theory and were called "spooky action at a distance" by Albert
Einstein. One of the founders of quantum theory, Erwin Schrödinger, dubbed this
peculiarity entanglement, remarking "I would not call that one but rather the characteristic
trait of quantum mechanics."
Quantum theory hypothesizes that if we know one of the relationships of a particle—our perception of it—then we can't know where the particle is going, and if we know its movement in relation to other entities, we can't know where the particle is. In other words, if you know a particle as having a precise independent existence, you can't know anything about its relationship to the rest of reality; and if you know its relationship to the rest of reality, you can't know anything about its independent existence. We can say, then, that a particle doesn't really have independent being; it is composed of its relationships.

**The Human Essence**

An invisible but very real Force, with empirically observable effects, exists, drawing entities together to form greater wholes. This Force pulled the components of the first living cell together and caused single cells to colonize and then become a metazoan creature. We see this Force at work in social insects building hives and mounds and in human beings building societies and civilizations.

"A human being is a part of the whole, called by us 'Universe,' a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest - a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security."

*Albert Einstein*

The essence of a genuine human is as a manifestation of the Divine. Our life work is to purify the channel of our being so that the Divine can express through us. As Jacob Boehme says in his book *Of the Supersensual Life*: "When you stop willing and thinking self then the eternal hearing, seeing and speaking will be revealed within you, and God will see and hear through you."

"May not you and I be confluent in a higher consciousness, and conflually active there, though we now know it not? We finite minds may simultaneously be co-conscious with one another in a super-human intelligence."

*William James, A Pluralistic Universe*
Dialectical Interpersonal Relationships

Interaction and communication within genuine relationships evince an uncommon, supernormal openness, considerateness, and honesty which can be experienced in no other atmosphere. Once a person has experienced this kind of interaction, the "small talk" and inanity of ordinary interchange seems unrewarding and repugnant.

Participants in dialectical interchange are better able to "see" and "listen to" others—in the interchange environment and otherwise. Ego distractions no longer blind and deafen us, and we suddenly discern deeper meanings within persons, events and objects, enabling new, more potent responses.

Participants in dialectic are more capable of disclosing feelings and ideas, both those which they are aware of when the interchange begins and those newly realized elements which appear as the dialectical process proceeds.

Dialectic is a phenomenon which must be actually experienced before it can be fully understood. Attempting to make Dialectic clear to persons who haven't participated in its reality is like trying to convey an adequate idea of sight to a person born blind. Those discerning enough to seek out true information about, prepare for, and then actually experience Dialectic interchange, become members of a small philosophical fellowship.

As we've seen, entities—including persons—are ontologically constituted by their relationships. This is no more true than in dialectical interpersonal relationships. Persons within the Perennial tradition are created through their dialectical relationships with other members of that small community. In dialectical interchange, we create and re-create ourselves, not through coercion, conflict, or compromise, but through co-investigation, cooperation, co-learning, and co-discovery.

To most people, to say that person A's relationship with person B creates him, would imply that A was dependent on, subservient to, or inferior to B. In genuine dialectical relationships, the opposite is true: no negative dependency, subservience, or inferiority is involved. The mystical, alchemical aspects of dialectical interchange create and re-create persons, personalities, events, and other entities in a numinous manner.

As an example, in any genuine dialectical relationship, a person's understanding and practice of love is re-created, refined, and ameliorated. This improvement in comprehending the essence of love does not occur through argument, debate, or conflict, but through the transcendent processes of discovering new aspects of the other participant(s) and of oneself in dialectical interchange.

Any original egocentric need to defend one's stance, in a feeling that not maintaining one's position would involve weakness and capitulation, dissolves as the genuine affection and respect each has for the other begins to work its magic.
Persons realize that many of their previous psychological "needs," beliefs, and scruples were merely elements of Reichian "armoring" that they no longer need in a genuine interchange environment. Old habits of arguing for argument sake, maintaining one's cherished beliefs out of sheer stubbornness, and protecting one's persona from attack at all costs, are now seen to be unnecessary, counter-productive defense mechanisms.

"In contrast are those who approach a situation by preparing nothing in advance, not bolstering themselves up in any way. Instead, they respond spontaneously and productively; they forget about themselves, about the knowledge, the positions they have. Their egos do not stand in their own way, and it is precisely for this reason that they can fully respond to the other person and that person's ideas. They give birth to new ideas, because they are not holding onto anything. While the having persons rely on what they have, the being persons rely on the fact that they are, that they are alive and that something new will be born if only they have the courage to let go and to respond. They come fully alive in the conversation, because they do not stifle themselves by anxious concern with what they have. Their own aliveness is infectious and often helps the other person to transcend his or her egocentricity. Thus the conversation ceases to be an exchange of commodities (information, knowledge, status) and becomes a dialogue in which it does not matter any more who is right."

Erich Fromm, *To Have Or To Be?*

The vast difference between persons who have experienced genuine dialectical interchange and those who have not is no more apparent than when descriptions of the dynamics of dialectical interaction are presented, as above. Persons external to the Perennial Tradition find it impossible to credit the portrayal of dialectical relationships. Living in a culture beset by egomania, having totally acceded to the idea that one must maintain personal defenses and maintain one's "ground," having excelled in the invisible "assertiveness training" of American society, they're only able to "see" dialectical relationships in terms of compromise, concession, and capitulation.

Yet, genuine dialectical interchange between advanced persons moves beyond the ordinary limitations of commonplace relations and enters the realm of the transcendent. The interchange becomes a shared mystical experience in which each realizes his or her essence and the truth of the element which they are mutually investigating.

"Only in the process of mutual alive relatedness can the other and I overcome the barrier of separateness, inasmuch as we both participate in the dance of life."

Erich Fromm, *To Have Or To Be?*
We're distinguishing between genuine and inauthentic relationships because most interpersonal relationships in today's world possess negative, debilitating elements that turn them into war zones, master/slave alliances, or prisons of compromise. The genuine relationships we'll explore are those among persons working within the Perennial Tradition.

A horrid example of such Websites is: www.savethemales.ca

"The prestige and power of psychiatrists have been augmented by defining increasingly larger domains as falling within the purview of their special discipline." Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness*, 1961

Karl Marx, *Capital*

Erich Fromm, *To Have Or To Be?*, p. xxix

Ibid.

Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*

Erich Fromm, *To Have Or To Be?*, p. 100

Erich Fromm, *To Have Or To Be?*, p. xxxi

The word "theory" is used deliberately to indicate that quantum mechanics and other current systems of thought are in essence *hypotheses* that continue to be tested and verified.

From an article in thisquantumworld.com

A genuine human persists in continuous improvement because she wishes to develop her full potential. Unfortunately, most persons in today's world remain the same throughout their lives.

I'm referring to the connotations of creation as: "investing with a new form" and "producing or bringing about by a course of action or behavior"

Numinous: filled with a sense of the presence of divinity; paranormal (beyond normal)
Chapter Fourteen: Dialectical Communication

As indicated in the dedication, this book is in a very real way a co-creation of myself and my wife, Michelle Mairesse. Though the original impetus for the ideas within the chapters of this book begin with me, our dialectical interchange concerning the ideas and Michelle’s discerning editing of the copy constitute a new phenomena which can best be termed: dialectical writing.¹

Dialectical writing, a core element of dialectical communication, has never before been identified or utilized in this specific manner. This chapter in particular developed from ongoing dialectical interchange and is itself an example of dialectical writing.

In chapter ten we saw that life is an ongoing dialectical interchange between humans and an unknown reality appearing, emerging, being released into existence. For those capable of philosophical understanding, dialectic becomes the accustomed mode of speaking, feeling, and sharing concepts.

When two or more advanced persons engage in authentic dialectical interchange, in some sense they "write" or compose shared personal events. Those events may or may not be later recorded in written form. Interchange between true philosophers possesses the nature of "dialectical writing" in an interesting metaphysical sense.

No Hidden Agendas in Dialectical Interchange

We found that material created in this "dialectical writing" mode only begins with intimations and intuitions, not a finished concept. We came to realize that the conceiving phase was very real and that Socrates' claim that he had no prior knowledge of what was to transpire in dialectical interchange was not ironic but literal.

Adeimantus: "I divine that you're looking into the question of whether or not we'll allow tragedy and comedy into our city.

Socrates: "Perhaps, and perhaps even more than that, for I myself really don't know yet, but whatever direction dialectic leads us, that's where we must go."

Plato, Commonwealth III, 394d

A superficial reading of Plato's dialogues encourages the "learned" scholar to suppose that Socrates' claim that he was ignorant was merely a ploy, a pretence, nothing but word-play. Scholastics refuse to take seriously what Socrates himself said: that he
possessed only the knowledge of what he did not know, that he had only the advantage of being aware of his own ignorance. Socrates was sincere in saying that he did not begin a dialogue with an agenda.

**Does Dialectical Interchange Teach?**

People in Socrates' and Plato's time assumed that they used Dialectic to propound their philosophical views. However, dialectical interchange is "instructional" only indirectly and fortuitously. This is an aspect of authentic dialectical interchange which is particularly challenging to grasp. No true Perennialist-Platonist uses Dialectic as a soapbox or pulpit. One must approach Dialectic with *no* pre-determined agenda; the event must unfold without being forced to meet pre-arranged guidelines or strict objectives. There may be a theme that one of the participants proposes, but, as in all dialectical interchange, even such a possible theme may be jettisoned if the magic moves in another direction.

Within dialectical interchange, one participant may be more advanced than another. But the ordinary, traditional teacher-student relationship does not apply. For example, the student must not assume that the interchange will be continually supervised or initiated by the teacher. The student must take equal responsibility for the interchange, both in mental, psychological, spiritual preparation and in initiatory activity within the interchange.

In dialectical interchange a person comes to meanings and concepts which he or she strongly believes to be correct. The declaration of those insights may appear, to the uninitiated, as "teaching" or even pontificating. But *all* content in authentic dialectical interchange is provisional and subject to review and revision. This aspect of Platonic dialectical interchange distinguishes it unmistakably from the usual Guru-Disciple relationship in Hinduism, Buddhism, and other authoritarian religions.

Within the context of dialectical interchange—the primary mode of investigation and learning in the Perennial Tradition—the teacher and student are both seekers. The teacher will have achieved higher understanding and the student will be seeking increased awareness and discernment, but both are equally engaged in opening to the transcendent realities—meanings, concepts, sensibilities—that reveal themselves during dialectical interchange. They are both equally “students” involved in their own level of learning.

In some instances, dialectical interchange occurs between persons who are equal in development: both persons being teacher and student simultaneously. An instance of this occurs in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, when Elizabeth and Darcy teach each other about themselves and in turn learn from the other.

**Indirect Teaching within Dialectical Interchange**

We get a very striking picture of the indirectness of teaching within dialectical interchange in the movie “Harold and Maude.”
People viewing the movie receive a stunning "teaching" that many don't "get" or misconstrue. For example, persons who after seeing Harold and Maude ask themselves: "What did he see in her?" miss the point of the movie entirely.

The deeper meaning of the movie is that Maude is an advanced teacher dealing with a beginning student, Harold, teaching him how to die before he dies. Harold is obsessed with physical dying until Maude liberates him from the living death he had elected.

Harold: I decided then I enjoyed being dead.
Maude: A lot of people enjoy being dead. But they are not dead, really. They’re just backing away from life. *Reach* out. Take a *chance.* Get *hurt* even. But play as well as you can. Go team, go!

Maude has "died" to the superficiality of ordinary life and sees the world through her spiritual senses. She seems weird to most people. Harold has grasped the unreal nature of common life and has attempted to mimic death. But he must learn from Maude the essence of dying before he dies.

Maude - ..I like to watch things grow.
................They grow, and bloom, and fade, and die, and change ............
....into something else!

Maude: But, Harold, we begin to die as soon as we are born. What is so strange about death? It's no surprise. It's part of life. It's change.

Maude: (smiles warmly)
And this too shall pass away.
Harold: Never! Never! I'll never forget you. I wanted to marry you. Don't you understand! I love you. I love you!
Maude: Oh! That's wonderful, Harold. Go - and love some more.

Static Concepts Can't Explain Dialectical Interchange

Social exchange theory is a social psychological and sociological perspective that tries to explain social change and stability as a process of negotiated exchanges between parties. Social exchange theory posits that all human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives. For example, when a person perceives the costs of a relationship as outweighing the perceived benefits, then the theory predicts that the person will choose to leave the relationship. The theory has roots in economics, psychology and sociology.

For social exchange theorists, when the costs and benefits are equal in a relationship, then that relationship is defined as equitable. The notion of equity is a core part of social exchange theory.
It's impossible to use "social exchange theory" in exploring or describing authentic dialectical interchange. The relationship between interchange participants is sometime unequal. The participants in authentic dialectical interchange may not all feel that they have received equal value from their intercommunication.

A touchstone is a test, criterion, or object for determining the quality or genuineness of an entity. When we've once experienced authentic dialectic, it's clear that this is the touchstone for genuine interpersonal and non-personal interchange and intercommunication. Participants in dialectic open their consciousness to embrace "the other" as they share the mystical experience that is dialectical interchange. Their beings widen to enfold persons or transformative material, with an ultimate goal of union—a coming together of once-divergent elements, gritty ideas that provoke the production of a pearl.

Dialectical Interchange Exposes the Debilitating Self

One of the ways you can determine if you're engaged in a genuine dialectical interchange is if this relationship exposes your debilitating self. The debilitating self inevitably rears its ugly head whenever persons attempt to engage in authentic dialectical interchange because it fears real exposure.

Always pretending to be the angel of light and reason, the debilitating self may try to convince you that you don't have the capability to engage in dialectical interchange, that this is too exalted a process for your meager talents. Yes, dialectical interchange is an unfamiliar manner of relating to others and requires summoning the courage to step into new territory and learn new skills. But, dialectical interchange is not beyond the powers of anyone who will make the leap into learning to fly by the seat of one's pants and allowing the flow-through of the ever-present outpouring of inspiration.

"I have nothing important to say," the debilitating self whines, or "My views wouldn't be accepted by the others, they'd reject what I offer or twist it into an unrecognizable shape. I want what I say or write to be just as I express it, with no one else mangling my deathless prose and its faultless style."

You know you're experiencing genuine dialectical self-transformation when you regularly discover traits and behaviors in yourself of which you were previously unaware, negative elements that control you without your being cognizant of them.

Genuine dialectical interchange inevitably results in participants discovering character traits that they want to change—and the incentive for that personal transformation. One of the outstanding illustrations of such personal transformation on the part of two persons in a dialectical relationship occurs in Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*.

"It taught me to hope," said he, "as I had scarcely ever allowed myself to hope before. I knew enough of your disposition to be certain that, had you been absolutely,
irrevocably decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lady Catherine, frankly and openly."

Elizabeth coloured and laughed as she replied, "Yes, you know enough of my frankness to believe me capable of that. After abusing you so abominably to your face, I could have no scruple in abusing you to all your relations."

"What did you say of me, that I did not deserve? For, though your accusations were ill-founded, formed on mistaken premises, my behaviour to you at the time had merited the severest reproof. It was unpardonable. I cannot think of it without abhorrence."

"We will not quarrel for the greater share of blame annexed to that evening," said Elizabeth. "The conduct of neither, if strictly examined, will be irreproachable; but since then, we have both, I hope, improved in civility."

"I cannot be so easily reconciled to myself. The recollection of what I then said, of my conduct, my manners, my expressions during the whole of it, is now, and has been many months, inexpressibly painful to me. Your reproof, so well applied, I shall never forget: 'had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner.' Those were your words. You know not, you can scarcely conceive, how they have tortured me;--though it was some time, I confess, before I was reasonable enough to allow their justice."

"I was certainly very far from expecting them to make so strong an impression. I had not the smallest idea of their being ever felt in such a way."
"I can easily believe it. You thought me then devoid of every proper feeling, I am sure you did. The turn of your countenance I shall never forget, as you said that I could not have addressed you in any possible way that would induce you to accept me."

"Oh! do not repeat what I then said. These recollections will not do at all. I assure you that I have long been most heartily ashamed of it." Darcy mentioned his letter.

"Did it," said he, "did it soon make you think better of me? Did you, on reading it, give any credit to its contents?"

She explained what its effect on her had been, and how gradually all her former prejudices had been removed.

"I knew," said he, "that what I wrote must give you pain, but it was necessary. I hope you have destroyed the letter. There was one part especially, the opening of it, which I should dread your having the power of reading again. I can remember some expressions which might justly make you hate me."

"The letter shall certainly be burnt, if you believe it essential to the preservation of my regard; but, though we have both reason to think my opinions not entirely unalterable, they are not, I hope, quite so easily changed as that implies."
"When I wrote that letter," replied Darcy, "I believed myself perfectly calm and cool, but I am since convinced that it was written in a dreadful bitterness of spirit."

"The letter, perhaps, began in bitterness, but it did not end so. The adieu is charity itself. But think no more of the letter. The feelings of the person who wrote, and the person who received it, are now so widely different from what they were then, that every unpleasant circumstance attending it ought to be forgotten. You must learn some of my philosophy. Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure."

"I cannot give you credit for any philosophy of the kind. Your retrospections must be so totally void of reproach, that the contentment arising from them is not of philosophy, but, what is much better, of innocence. But with me, it is not so. Painful recollections will intrude which cannot, which ought not, to be repelled. I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. As a child I was taught what was right, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately an only son (for many years an only child), I was spoilt by my parents, who, though good themselves (my father, particularly, all that was benevolent and amiable), allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing; to care for none beyond my own family circle; to think meanly of all the rest of the world; to wish at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own. Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased."

"Had you then persuaded yourself that I should?"

"Indeed I had. What will you think of my vanity? I believed you to be wishing, expecting my addresses."

"My manners must have been in fault, but not intentionally, I assure you. I never meant to deceive you, but my spirits might often lead me wrong. How you must have hated me after that evening?"

"Hate you! I was angry perhaps at first, but my anger soon began to take a proper direction."

"I am almost afraid of asking what you thought of me, when we met at Pemberley. You blamed me for coming?"

"No indeed; I felt nothing but surprise."
"Your surprise could not be greater than mine in being noticed by you. My conscience told me that I deserved no extraordinary politeness, and I confess that I did not expect to receive more than my due."

"My object then," replied Darcy, "was to show you, by every civility in my power, that I was not so mean as to resent the past; and I hoped to obtain your forgiveness, to lessen your ill opinion, by letting you see that your reproofs had been attended to. How soon any other wishes introduced themselves I can hardly tell, but I believe in about half an hour after I had seen you."

He then told her of Georgiana's delight in her acquaintance, and of her disappointment at its sudden interruption; which naturally leading to the cause of that interruption, she soon learnt that his resolution of following her from Derbyshire in quest of her sister had been formed before he quitted the inn, and that his gravity and thoughtfulness there had arisen from no other struggles than what such a purpose must comprehend.

She expressed her gratitude again, but it was too painful a subject to each, to be dwelt on farther.

"Those who understand Higher Wisdom do not speak in an ordinary manner.

Those who speak in an ordinary manner do not grasp Higher Knowledge.

Lao-tzu, Oriental Teacher

Dialectical Interchange Requires Autonomy, Intelligence, and Honesty

Interaction and communication within dialectic evinces an uncommon, supernormal openness, considerateness, and honesty which can be experienced in no other atmosphere. Once a person has experienced this kind of interaction, the "small talk" and inanity of ordinary interchange seems unrewarding and repugnant.

Participants in dialectical interchange are better able to "see" and "listen to" others—in the interchange environment and otherwise. Ego distractions no longer blind and deafen us, and we suddenly discern deeper meanings within persons, events and objects, enabling new, more potent responses.

Participants in Dialectic are more capable of disclosing feelings and ideas, both those which they are aware of when the interchange begins and those newly realized elements which appear as the dialectical process proceeds.

Many persons are incapable of participating in dialectical interchange because they lack the requisite autonomy, intelligence, and honesty. Until very recently, women were not
considered "equal" to men, and relationships were male dominated. Misquoting the Bible's "a woman shall cleave to her husband," English law enshrined this inequality. English jurist William Blackstone, arbiter of English law pontificated: "in law a husband and wife are one person, and the husband is that person."

The destructive prejudice of female inferiority is illustrated by a letter which Charlotte Brontë received from the British Poet Laureate of the time, Robert Southey, when she sent him a sample of her work:

Keswick, March 1837

Madam,

. . . . Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as accomplishment and a recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, and when you are you will be less eager for celebrity . . .

Today, Southey is a literary embarrassment, while Charlotte Brontë lives.

For two or more persons to engage in genuine dialectical interchange, it's necessary that they both possess mental and spiritual autonomy. Their stations in life do not necessarily need to be equal. All participants must be able to think for themselves and must possess the personal force to maintain their own "position." An interesting example of personal autonomy is that between Jane and Mr. Rochester in the novel Jane Eyre. Though Jane is Mr. Rochester's hired governess and he her "master," she possesses a completely autonomous mind which Mr. Rochester not just tolerates but admires.

I was dumb still. He bent his head a little towards me, and with a single hasty glance seemed to dive into my eyes.

"Stubborn?" he said, "and annoyed. Ah! it is consistent. I put my request in an absurd, almost insolent form. Miss Eyre, I beg your pardon. The fact is, once for all, I don’t wish to treat you like an inferior; that is" (correcting himself), "I claim only such superiority as must result from twenty years’ difference in age and a century’s advance in experience. This is legitimate, et j’y tiens, as Adèle would say; and it is by virtue of this superiority, and this alone, that I desire you to have the goodness to talk to me a little now, and divert my thoughts, which are galled with dwelling on one point—cankering as a rusty nail."

He had deigned an explanation, almost an apology, and I did not feel insensible to his condescension, and would not seem so.

"I am willing to amuse you, if I can, sir—quite willing; but I cannot introduce a
topic, because how do I know what will interest you? Ask me questions, and I will do my best to answer them."

"Then, in the first place, do you agree with me that I have a right to be a little masterful, abrupt, perhaps exacting, sometimes, on the grounds I stated, namely, that I am old enough to be your father, and that I have battled through a varied experience with many men of many nations, and roamed over half the globe, while you have lived quietly with one set of people in one house?"

"Do as you please, sir."

"That is no answer; or rather it is a very irritating, because a very evasive one. Reply clearly."

"I don’t think, sir, you have a right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have; your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience."

"Humph! Promptly spoken. But I won’t allow that, seeing that it would never suit my case, as I have made an indifferent, not to say a bad, use of both advantages. Leaving superiority out of the question, then, you must still agree to receive my orders now and then, without being piqued or hurt by the tone of command. Will you?"

I smiled: I thought to myself Mr. Rochester is peculiar—he seems to forget that he pays me £30 per annum for receiving his orders. "The smile is very well," said he, catching instantly the passing expression; "but speak too."

"I was thinking, sir, that very few masters would trouble themselves to inquire whether or not their paid subordinates were piqued and hurt by their orders."

"Paid subordinates! What! you are my paid subordinate, are you? Oh yes, I had forgotten the salary! Well then, on that mercenary ground, will you agree to let me hector a little?"

"No, sir, not on that ground; but, on the ground that you did forget it, and that you care whether or not a dependent is comfortable in his dependency, I agree heartily."

"And will you consent to dispense with a great many conventional forms and phrases, without thinking that the omission arises from insolence?"

"I am sure, sir, I should never mistake informality for insolence: one I rather like, the other nothing free-born would submit to, even for a salary."
"Humbug! Most things free-born will submit to anything for a salary; therefore, keep to yourself, and don’t venture on generalities of which you are intensely ignorant. However, I mentally shake hands with you for your answer, despite its inaccuracy; and as much for the manner in which it was said, as for the substance of the speech; the manner was frank and sincere; one does not often see such a manner: no, on the contrary, affectation, or coldness, or stupid, coarse-minded misapprehension of one’s meaning are the usual rewards of candour. Not three in three thousand raw school-girl-governesses would have answered me as you have just done. But I don’t mean to flatter you: if you are cast in a different mould to the majority, it is no merit of yours: Nature did it. And then, after all, I go too fast in my conclusions: for what I yet know, you may be no better than the rest; you may have intolerable defects to counterbalance your few good points."

Though the relationship between Jane and Mr. Rochester at this point in the novel is one of mutual autonomy, it still lacks the element of complete honesty. Only when both Mr. Rochester and Jane are totally honest with each other does the relationship come to full fruition.

"We experience this other self . . . in such a way that we feel almost as though . . . we confront what we might call our past, brought into the spirit world in the form of memory and transformed into something spiritual by being brought there. And this past of ours begins a conversation in the region where living thought-beings converse." 3

1 Written material originating from dialectical interchange has previously been featured in two essays on the New Enlightenment Website (www.hermes-press.com):
   • The Triumph of Will
   • Diotima and Socrates

Dialectical writing is entirely new, in that we find no historical record of persons deliberately engaging in dialectical interchange as the mode of producing written material. However, there have been instances of dialectical interchange being recorded in written form, beginning with Plato's dialogues.

2 We’re distinguishing between authentic and inauthentic dialectical interchange because most philosophers continue to assume that dialectic is merely argument or debate.

3 Dan Merkur, "Gnosis: An Esoteric Tradition of Mystical Visions and Unions"
Chapter Fifteen: How Philosophy Overcomes Tyranny

This chapter provides an answer to the question that so many of us are presently asking: In the face of presumably invincible fascistic tyranny, what can we do? That a civilized force such as philosophy is actually able to overcome tyranny is indeed surprising and heartening.

It requires a discerning mind to grasp how philosophy is able to conquer unrestrained repressive power. But the potency philosophy possesses to overcome tyranny is real—not some ethereal metaphysical conjecture meant to soothe and befuddle the credulous.

We'll first demarcate philosophy within a larger domain: the Perennial Tradition. Following that, we'll see how modern tyranny is attempting to destroy the genuine teaching and learning of Platonic philosophy. Last, we'll examine precisely how philosophy is able to conquer tyranny and what part we can play in this cosmic struggle.

"We have spoken of 'Plato's philosophy' and 'Platonic teaching', but this is only a manner of speaking, for the philosophy, the teaching does not belong to Plato, it is not his creation. His is a sublime formulation of something which was there before him, which has always been and which will remain even if his name be forgotten."

Raphael, *Initiation Into the Philosophy of Plato*, 1999

**Philosophy As a Disclosure of the Perennial Tradition**

As we discussed in chapter two, Plato’s process and conception of *philosophia*—the love of and the search for Wisdom—is one of the most important of the embodiments of the Perennial Tradition. The secret legacy which teaches this transformative process, the single stream of initiatory teaching flowing through all the great schools of philosophy and mysticism, is the Perennial Tradition. ¹

Perennialist teaching material and teaching methods are the outcome of creative adaptation by initiated teachers of the identical stream of Perennialist truth to contemporary needs. Each Perennialist teacher develops a different embodiment of the fundamental truths, not because she is borrowing from her predecessors and building her own philosophical system on the basis of their ideas, ² but because the needs of her students, relative to their own time and place in history, require new compilations and techniques.
Plato, who originated the disclosure of the Perennial Tradition named philosophy, taught select students how to attain a state of higher discernment that was termed Wisdom. Instruction in attaining this state was named *philosophia*, the quest for wisdom.

Tyrannies of many stripes have—throughout history—attacked Perennialist teachings in general, and philosophy in particular, because they understood them to be inimical to their ruthless manipulation and exploitation of the masses. A partial list would include:

- **Political tyranny:**
  - The murderous Athenian senate that sentenced Socrates to death on trumped-up charges
  - The Jewish Sanhedrin and the Roman ruler Pontius Pilate who sentenced Jesus of Nazareth to death as a terrorist

- **Religious tyranny:**
  - The "Christian" oppressors and the "Christian" Emperor Justinian who in 529 CE closed down the Platonic Academy, claiming that it was a pagan establishment
  - The "Christian" Roman Catholic and Protestant tyrants who murdered Bruno and Servetus, among many others, and have enslaved their followers' minds throughout the centuries

- **Modern scholastic tyranny:**
  - Anti-intellectual pseudo-scholars such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche who claimed that Plato destroyed an original Greek nature-philosophy and replaced it with a deformed system in which the real is made subordinate to thought
  - Contemporary crackpots such as Martin Heidegger, Karl Popper, and Leo Strauss who were created by fascist rulers to try to destroy philosophy in general and Plato's thought in particular

To understand why tyrannies throughout the ages have attacked philosophy, we'll examine in detail the murderous attack on Plato by agents of despotism.

**The Quintessential Plato**

A great number of the enlightening and transformative concepts and institutions that constitute the heritage of our modern world originated in Plato's writings. It's impossible to determine just how debased human life would now be had these teachings not been available to enlightened thinkers.

Political and religious tyrannies overwhelmed humankind in the Dark Ages. It was only when Perennialist teachings such as the Hermetic corpus and Plato's writings again became available that we in the West were able to pull ourselves up out of barbarity and depravity to a more enlightened existence. In earlier chapters in this book, we explore how the underlying bases of contemporary political systems are founded on Plato's concept of a natural, divine law which humans must follow to achieve justice and right government.
We've examined his ideas concerning the human powers of reason, self-awareness, and language--which have shaped our entire Western civilization.

**The Degradation of Philosophy**

Immediately following Plato, beginning with his student Aristotle, the degradation of *philosophia* into scholastic philosophy began. *Philosophia*, properly understood, involves a transformation of one's inner being, a pursuit that rules every aspect of one's life. This acquisition of mystical knowledge does not come from doing research in a university library; it involves a special method of meditative contemplation and an entire way of life.

Plato understood that only a few people are able to authentically practice *philosophia*--the love of and the search for wisdom.

"The genuine practitioners of philosophy will be but a small remnant. . . . Those who belong to this small class have tasted how sweet and blessed a possession philosophy is."

*Plato, The Commonwealth, VI*

Plato elaborates on how difficult it is to practice true philosophy, resulting in a very small number of genuine philosophers. He also explains that even this small number of true philosophers are not recognized and their ideas are not often used by the masses.

"Suppose you now take this parable [of the mutineering seamen] to the gentleman who is surprised at finding that philosophers have no honor in their cities; explain it to him and try to convince him that their having honor would be far more extraordinary. . .

"Say to him, that, in deeming the best votaries of philosophy to be useless to the rest of the world, he is right; but also tell him to attribute their uselessness to the fault of those who will not use them, and not to themselves. The pilot should not humbly beg the sailors to be commanded by him -- that is not the order of nature; neither are 'the wise to go to the doors of the rich' -- the ingenious author of this saying told a lie -- but the truth is, that, when a man is ill, whether he be rich or poor, to the physician he must go, and he who wants to be governed, to him who is able to govern. The ruler who is good for anything ought not to beg his subjects to be ruled by him; although the present governors of mankind are of a different stamp; they may be justly compared to the mutinous sailors, and the true helmsmen to those who are called by them good for nothings and stargazers."

**Modern Attacks on Plato**

Modern tyrants who've seized illegitimate political, economic, and military power--the group I delineate as the Demonic Cabal--recognize the continuing force of Plato's influence--and hence its danger to their depraved manipulation of human minds and their insane totalitarian offensives.
They've deliberately established counterfeit "philosophers" such as Martin Heidegger, Karl Popper, and Leo Strauss and others to try to distort, obfuscate, and obliterate genuine teaching of the Platonic philosophy from our universities and colleges. In this, they have been unusually successful—so much so that the only genuine teachers of the Platonic philosophy today are to be found outside academia. 5

To give too much attention to these counterfeit sophists would be to bestow on them an importance totally beyond their true worth. But we must understand why these attacks by tyranny have been made on philosophy and how they can be counteracted—how philosophy ultimately defeats tyranny of all kinds.

Philosophy's Current Bad Reputation

Orthodox "philosophers," beginning with Aristotle, employed a process of weeding out, as they put it, the esoteric and mystical and proclaiming logic as the supreme methodology. Aristotle and his successors believed that they were purging human thought of mythical rubbish and replacing it with hard-headed, rationalist explanations which met the tests of logic and common sense. So, from that time till today's inert, useless college course in analytic philosophy, the counterfeit has been sold as the genuine.

Modern academic philosophers have a deservedly bad name throughout the world at present—much like their ill repute during the time of Plato. In The Commonwealth, Socrates explains how spurious philosophy—sophism—has turned people off, because of its counterfeit nature. Since unthinking people identify sophism with philosophy, they think it is useless.

A number of thinkers—including Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Russell, Heidegger, Rorty and Derrida—have considered Western philosophy to be at a dead end. Their various accounts of the bankruptcy of that tradition range from seeing it as springing from intellectual fallacies at long last exposed and refuted, or as the long-standing corruption of an original human wisdom now standing in need of radical reconstitution.

While we must surely acknowledge the bankruptcy of modern academic philosophy into inane word analysis (P implies ~ ~P) or pop psychology (everybody has his own conception of reality), it's necessary to distinguish this counterfeit type of philosophy from genuine philosophy—as Plato did during his own time. Through many centuries of identifying casuistry, polemics, and scholasticism as philosophy, along with the loss of the ability to recognize or understand genuine philosophy, most contemporary thinkers can't grasp the true nature of the teachings of Perennialist sages such as Plato.

Modern Anti-Philosophy

Though modern academic "philosophy" has been deliberately debased and disfigured to the point of almost total uselessness, the continuing, pervasive influence of Platonic philosophy is so powerful a force for reason and just government, that the agents of tyranny feel it necessary to try to destroy it in any way possible. The absurdity and
wrong-headedness of Plato's self-appointed critics is masterfully described by Francis L. Jackson in his essay, “The Post-Philosophical Attack on Plato."

"The task to which post-Hegelian thinking thus enthusiastically applied itself was the discovery of the adequate critique of the Western spiritual and intellectual tradition, such as could lay the basis for a new ultra-spiritual standpoint both comprehensive of it and liberated from it. The common metaphor is a 'return to nature' in some fashion, whether through the romanticist invocation of an ante-historical spirit--the preeminence of culture--or the substitution of natural science for metaphysics as absolute knowledge. The former seeks to disclose and rehabilitate a pristine life and wisdom alleged to have been suppressed and corrupted by a domineering modern intellect which 'murders to dissect.' The latter opposes any such great leap backward and proposes a revolutionary emancipation from everything past, appealing to a new theology and psychology of the natural, Darwinian man. But the wish common to both is altogether to have done with the reason-ridden, idea-world of philosophy and to rediscover (or open up) entirely aboriginal (or entirely new) territories beyond the realm of the rational and a merely moral good and evil.

"This ultra-modernist program is of course ambiguous at its core. It is one thing simply to abandon thought as empty and useless activity. But how could it ever be possible to demonstrate the invalidity of philosophical reason; by what new standard and in what other form of discourse could the case be made against it?

"In spite of its prima facie implausibility, this tragic, high-operatic account of the intellectual history of the West still exercises enormous influence upon contemporary thinking; the more recent heroes of continental philosophy still perpetuate it."

Both Nietzsche and Heidegger typically begin with a claim to an epoch-making insight into the essential 'nihilism' of modernity as the final embodiment of a legacy of spiritual degeneration going back in time. The root cause of this cultural decay, or at least its crucial symptomatic expression, is declared to be epitomized in the historical cult of philosophy which as a matter of course elevates thought above life, plays down the sensible world as 'mere appearance', and seeks to comprehend and subordinate living reality under intellectual principles, the so-called “ideas.” The history of philosophy is thus, as Nietzsche puts it, “the history of a lie whose consequence is just nihilism, the culture-negative culture of modernity."

The incompetence and incoherence of these critics of Plato is plain for anyone to see. Academic philosophy has become completely infested with such learned imbeciles. I recommend Francis L. Jackson's essay referenced above, which intelligently refutes the Plato-critics' specious arguments and exposes them as pretentious frauds.

**Fear and Loathing of Leo Strauss**

One other misfit merits a brief mention, because he was the "philosophical godfather" of some of the vilest thugs in power within the Bush II junta. Leo Strauss
(1899-1973 CE) began his career in Nazi Germany. He was powerfully influenced by three philosophers admired by the Nazis: Friedrich Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Carl Schmitt. The Nazis worshipped Nietzsche as their hero.

As a young man, Strauss fell under Heidegger's influence. Heidegger was an avowed Nazi and continued to teach in Germany under the Hitler regime. Carl Schmitt, the Nazi philosopher of law, arranged a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship for Strauss to study Thomas Hobbes in France in 1932 and in England in 1934. Strauss entered the United States in 1937, ending up at the University of Chicago in 1949.

Using such frauds as Leo Strauss, the Rockefeller-dominated demonic cabal deliberately set out to destroy the genuine teaching and learning of Platonic philosophy, just as they purposely attempted to destroy American education in general.

**Paleoconservatives, Neocons, and Repuglicans**


Leo Strauss is the “Fascist Godfather of the neoconservatives.” His neocon disciples believe that an elite should use deception, religious fervor and perpetual war to control the credulous American population. The primary goal of Strauss and his disciples is to turn back the clock of history to before the Enlightenment, when ancient tyrannies ruled without restraint.

A Leo Strauss could only become a professor of philosophy in a demented age in which people in general and scholars in particular cannot see through his nonsense. Strauss, for example, claimed to have "discovered" a Plato without a doctrine of ideas or immortality of the soul, a Plato without metaphysics. I do not recommend that you read Strauss's works; they are nothing more than illiterate, obfuscating efforts to deliberately destroy philosophical discourse, sponsored by modern fascist rulers.

Strauss believed that liberalism, as practiced in the advanced nations of the West in the twentieth century, contains within it an intrinsic tendency towards relativism, which leads to nihilism (shades of Nietzsche). This is the same brand of nonsense peddled by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. We get a clear impression of Strauss's intellect when we learn that he believed that the Nazi Martin Heidegger possessed the greatest mind of the 20th century.

Strauss recommended the study of Plato only for the purpose of rediscovering the nature of political life which he believed had been perverted by Plato. Strauss's goal was to explicate the essence of modernity, which originated in the transformation of political
philosophy effected by Machiavelli. Strauss believed that Machiavelli was a genius who redirected political philosophy from an essentially contemplative or theoretical consideration of political elements to an active transformation of reality. Machiavelli replaced human will for nature as the source of cultural standards, Strauss claimed.

Strauss said (to paraphrase) that modernity is founded on the internalizing of the sources of morality within human subjectivity, and, as the necessary correlative of this, results in the oblivion of nature and total historicization of all moral and political standards. Translation: Strauss believed that people in power determine what's right or wrong and impose their will on weaker people.

That last concept should sound familiar, because it was a theme examined in several of Plato's dialogues: the belief that justice is the will of those in power. From this we can understand that all of the "modern" political-social-religious-philosophical issues that so fiercely exercise us today were discussed in Plato's writings and most of the ideals and values at the base of Western civilization originated from Plato's solutions to those issues.

**Plato's Concept of the Two Worlds**

Like all Perennialist teachers, Plato presents ideas that are non-ordinary. His ideas provide the occasion—with persons who are prepared—for psychic upheaval into a higher state of consciousness.

As we'll see, Plato's concept of reality—when genuinely understood—produces a shock. Most of Plato's ideas have been misunderstood because we fail to take Plato at his word—we fail to take him literally. We assume his meaning for a term such as "reality" is what we understand it to mean. As we'll see, what he meant by reality is something completely different. We assume that we can grasp his meaning of reality easily. Actually, it's a concept that requires considerable effort to understand.

Plato spoke of two “worlds.”

1. The world of truth
2. The world of delusion and tyranny

All of Plato's writings are a kind of ongoing struggle against the world of delusion and tyranny and a championing of the world of truth and reality. The participants in the dialogues represent one or the other of these two worlds.

In *The Commonwealth*, Plato identified a genuine philosopher as "one whose heart is fixed on reality itself." It's clear that what he means by "reality" is not what we now take it to mean in ordinary thought.

"What is at issue is the conversion of the mind from the twilight of error to the truth, that climb up into the real world which we shall call true philosophy."
Plato speaks of "ordinary reality" as a "twilight world" and the higher world which only seekers of wisdom can discern, "the truth," "the real world," or "true philosophy."

"When the mind's eye rests on objects illuminated by truth and reality, it understands and comprehends them, and functions intelligently; but when it turns to the twilight world of change and decay, it can only form opinions, its vision is confused and its beliefs shifting, and it seems to lack intelligence."

To understand what Plato meant by reality, it's necessary to consider what he intends to convey through the concept of the "twilight world" of delusion, ignorance, and tyranny.

Most people assume that Plato is denigrating "ordinary reality" by saying that it participates in such qualities as change, mere opinion, and time. They think Plato is describing the "sensible world" by contrasting it to his "World of Forms"--which many identify as a realm of unreal ideas that are actually (as Aristotle claimed) mere generalizations and conceptualizations abstracted from "hard" realities such as nuts, bolts, and brain matter.

We can only understand what Plato meant by "twilight world" if we think clearly about our current political-social situation. At present, we are faced with a demonic cabal which has created a false reality in which:

- They lie and make people believe it is the truth; they can "get away with murder"--do whatever they want to without any possibility of facing consequences

- They proclaim their diseased minds as the measure of human and social order, e.g. bringing democracy to Iraq

- They manipulate most people's minds by controlling what ideas are disseminated--because they own the major communication outlets: TV, newspapers, publishing

- They stole two presidential elections (2000 and 2004) and put in place the means (voting machines and corrupt Republican officials in key states) to try to steal all future elections

- As one Bush II Senior advisor said: "That's not the way the world really works anymore [reasoning to find the truth]. We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality."

We must work with this conception of a "false reality" made to appear as the "true reality" to comprehend what Plato understood the world of untruth to be. For Plato, the deception, ignorance, and tyranny of a gang of fascist thugs such as the demonic cabal is precisely what he meant by "false reality."

We tend to think that Plato's conception of false reality as a "twilight world" involves only philosophical elements such as change, opinion, belief versus knowledge, and so on.
When we examine Plato's writings—considering carefully the content of his dialogues and letters—it becomes clear that Plato's overarching intention was a continuing struggle against the false world of tyranny and ignorance, just as we are experiencing today.

We must continually keep in mind that Plato had already lost his dearest friend and teacher Socrates in the battle against unrestrained oppressive power. This was not a dilettantish discussion or dainty debate; Plato's struggle against tyranny was a matter of life or death. He understood that he was battling against oppression in many forms to win the minds of young people who would be the future leaders.

Plato saw the philosophical shortcomings of the "ordinary world," but he also struggled against social, political, and cultural corruptions which were a part of that deranged world. His fight against tyranny is clearly seen, for example, in his Gorgias.

The world of delusion, ignorance, violence, and tyranny is so pervasive at present—has infected and deformed so many people's minds and souls—that most Americans don't even see it—or do anything about it even if they happen to notice it for a moment.

As I am writing this book, I happened to watch (for an instant) the Larry King Live TV "news" program where Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice simply lied without compunction—and Larry King didn't call her on her lies or register surprise or indignation that a lie had been perpetrated on his program. The basic premise of the TV part of the World of Untruth is that lying is perfectly acceptable behavior. Members of the cabal do it every day of the week.

Following the 2000 coup d'état that allowed Bush II to seize power illegally and the 2004 election in which Karl Rove's Nazis rigged the votes and the vote counting, an entire "shadow world" has been systematically created in which lies are truths, crimes go entirely unnoticed, the destruction of Constitutional liberties is ongoing, men and women are sent to Iraq to die for oil and Halliburton profits, and working class Americans are ground into the dirt. People throughout the world have become so accustomed to and benumbed by this "shadow world" of ignorance, repression, and tyranny that they no longer see the real world of truth clearly if at all.

The essence of Plato's philosophy was an ongoing battle against exactly the same kind of twisted, unreal, counterfeit world that we presently face. Philosophy—the search for wisdom and truth—arises out of the resistance of the soul to its destruction by a perverted world. The situation Plato faced—and we now face—is the life-or-death of our very being.

"To be deceived or uninformed in the soul about true being means that 'the lie itself' has taken possession of 'the highest part of himself' and steeped it into 'ignorance of the soul.'"

Plato, Gorgias (382a-b)
Not working to discover the truth and not having reasoned opinions about what is happening in the world is a way of being complicit in the tyranny that is oppressing humankind.

Philosophy must be engaged in social-political analysis--among other things--because the order or disorder of a society shapes its citizens' minds and souls. All persons who want to safeguard their essential being must engage in philosophy, in the sense of searching assiduously for the truth: what is really happening in the world and in ourselves.

Ordinary people can be "philosophers" through resisting the mind-manipulation of the many members or fellow-travelers of the cabal. A philosopher is any one who resists the attempt by the world of untruth to corrupt his soul, his higher self. Any genuine philosophy at present must struggle against the world of untruth created by the demonic cabal. If you read something by a so-called contemporary philosopher that isn't battling against the current form of tyranny, then you know that he or she is not a genuine philosopher.

We must realize that we're in a battle not merely for whether this particular puppet regime of the demonic cabal starts this pre-emptive war or that, but with whether or not our very being will be subverted by lies and false values.

A depraved society--such as we now face--can destroy a person's soul, because the disorder of society is a disease in the psyche of it members. The philosopher guards her own soul against the degradations of the surrounding society which press on her. The philosopher diagnoses the health and disease in her personal soul and at the same time examines disorder in a deranged society.

Plato reminds us that our resistance to a deranged world depends for its success on a precise comprehension of those against whom we struggle. One of the requirements for discerning the true essence of our antagonists is to describe their beliefs and actions in a straightforward manner. We must, in other words, refer to what is happening today by its true nature--totalitarianism--instead of masking it with such lies as "incompetence," "receiving false intelligence," and "well-intentioned but bungling efforts."

That's why I've chosen to refer to the gang that has seized power in America as the demonic cabal and to describe their depraved behavior in forthright terms such as murder, lying, and deliberate destruction of people and social structures.

Part of what the demonic cabal tries to do is to appear to set the standards for polite discussion. They claim that using such terms as "demonic," "criminal," "cabal," or "murder" is uncouth or belies the disturbed mind of a conspiracy theorist. At the very moment their totally biased representatives are verbally attacking anyone who dares to speak forthrightly about the demonic cabal's perfidies, they smile and smile and continue to commit the most villainous acts.

Plato's writings--like no other--provide us with a clear understanding of the salient aspects of the world of deliberate ignorance, delusion, and tyranny. We read Plato's dialogues to see how we can struggle against soul-destroying ignorance in our present experience.
The manner in which Plato attacks the false world of delusion and oppression is extraordinary and contains subtleties which require our careful study. Plato created short dramas in which representatives of the two worlds meet to do battle--this is one of the major elements within his dialogues. He set the stage for his struggle against tyranny and laid out the terms of the discourse. This is essential because the actual members of the world of delusion and oppression--then and now--never enter an arena where they're required to present their true beliefs or values. A David Rockefeller, a Jim Baker, a Karl Rove, a Henry Kissinger, a George W. Bush, a Hillary Clinton, or a Barack Obama never allow themselves to get into situations where they would be forced to speak the truth. So, to do battle against them, we must create the universe of discourse.

That means that we must not allow representatives of the world of untruth—the demonic cabal—to set the stage when we're engaged in battle against them. It would be the height of foolishness, for example, to think that one could present a reasoned argument on propagandizing programs such as the Bill O'Reilly fiasco, the Sean Hannity farce, or the Hardball farce with the totally uncultured Chris Matthews. The only mainstream news program where it's possible to engage in reasoned argumentation is on Keith Olbermann’s Countdown show. Yet he feels compelled to devote thirty minutes to trivia to maintain his ratings.

The demonic cabal is able to control all mainstream means of communication in their "twilight world." And the only purpose of observing their lies and distortions is to understand those who see us as their enemy. Part of what Plato is doing in the dialogues is making it clear that he does not approach the other participants as hated enemies. Socrates sees himself as a participant in a struggle for the souls of humans, including those who hate him so much that they threaten to murder him. 

How Philosophy Overcomes Tyranny

Our struggle against the present "twilight world" of tyranny can take place in three arenas:

1. Progressive initiatives to defeat specific depraved policies or actions perpetrated by the demonic cabal and their fellow-travelers
2. Intra-personal dialogue of an enlightened nature with those few persons who are able to carry on such a transformative interchange
3. Writings on the Internet (such as this book) directed to the very few readers who possess the capability of responding intelligently and discerningly

In our ongoing struggle against tyranny, we must communicate and act in ways that are consistent with the "world of truth." We cannot use the vocabulary or the principles of the criminal cabal or accept their deranged world as reality. In Plato's dialogues, Socrates constantly remained within his own universe of understanding even when speaking with persons from the shadow world of lies and oppression. In the Gorgias, Socrates states what appears to Polus and the other participants in the dialogue to be an absurdity.
"A man who does evil does not do what he truly wills. For a man can truly will only what he thinks is good; if he commits evil acts in the mistaken belief that they serve his interest, he reveals thereby that he is powerless to do what he truly wills. Hence the tyrant is powerless."

When Polus hears this, he can't restrain himself. He starts sneering at Socrates.

"As if you, Socrates, don't wish you had the power to do whatever you'd like to do; as if you aren't jealous when you see someone killing or plundering or jailing people at his pleasure!"

Polus sneers at Socrates because he considers his personal vileness to be the measure of human success and decency. Polus believes that he knows what he wants and that he has the power to do what's best for himself. Like all persons corrupted and debased by the world of untruth, Polus projects his own baseness onto others. He can't believe that every person wouldn't indulge in vile acts if he had the chance to get away with them. This is why later in the Gorgias, Socrates will present the myth of the people who are invisible—and can get away with anything.

What appear to Polus and Callicles to be Socrates' absurd beliefs about humans only willing what they consider good, is actually Socrates' refusal to accede to the view of humankind perpetrated by the world of untruth—that all men are totally self-centered, know what is good for them, and can best live in a dog-eat-dog universe. Socrates is saying: "No, the higher reality of a human is his soul—not his undisciplined sensual desires and behaviors. A person truly wills—in his essence—what is good for him, and if he commits evil acts, thinking they serve his best interest, he has become deranged."

Socrates also defines the universe of discourse on his own terms when he refuses to be intimidated or silenced by Polus's or Callicles' jeering at him:

"Look at you, a penniless, powerless flatterer of the people. All the best people agree with us—and most of the common people as well. You're simply moving against the current of the times and no one of any importance listens to you. You're a nobody—especially compared to a great, popular ruler like Archelaus!"

Socrates will not be overpowered by onslaughts from the world of untruth. Unscathed, he persists in his assertions—which seem absolute nonsense to Polus and Callicles—that for a corrupt man such as Archelaus doing injustice is worse than suffering injustice, and that doing injustice without suffering the pangs of remorse and reformation of character is the worst of all fates.

Callicles begins a vicious verbal attack against Socrates, feeling defensive at Polus' poor showing in the ongoing debate (as they misinterpret the dialogue). Socrates refuses to bow to Callicles' attempts to overwhelm him with false principles: "whatever most people believe must be true," and "all intelligent people would agree with us." Socrates states very straightforwardly that the basis of their interchange cannot be specious shibboleths such as those Callicles is asserting, but the honest search for the truth. Otherwise, Socrates says, he
will discontinue trying to participate in a farce based on catchphrases and false assumptions.

Plato sees that the issue at stake is whether genuine communication and intelligibility can be maintained in a decadent society. Are the fundamental differences between Socrates and Callicles—between persons in the present who desire to seek the truth and those who wish to despoil the people—irreconcilable? Is the chasm between these two worlds so wide and deep that a bridge of common humanity connecting them is impossible?

Plato makes it clear that only if the denizens of the world of untruth are at least willing to try to adhere—during the dialogue—to principles of common decency and reasoned discourse based on the common experience of all humans, should a philosopher attempt to engage in communication with them. Otherwise it would be a waste of time and effort.

As we'll see, degenerate persons who have their being in the world of untruth and destruction cannot control themselves, so that they break their agreement to follow common principles of reasoned discourse whenever their passions overpower them.

Callicles agrees to discourse with Socrates because he sees him as a possible danger to his world. For Callicles, the degree of corruption which his world has attained is necessary and desirable. One of the few threats to this congenial connivance in criminality can be a man like Socrates who tries to persuade people that their world is corrupt and evil. If an appreciable sector of the people should agree with Socrates' ideas, the situation might become unpleasant for Callicles and his fellow-criminals.

Callicles hopes to destroy both Socrates' argument and Socrates himself as a threat to his world. He dismisses the conventional definition of justice as a ploy to terrify the stronger man who otherwise would get the better of the weaker. Justice is defined so that it appears shameful and unjust if a man desires to have more than others (pleonektein). In the conventional definition, justice is the desire for equality and injustice is the desire to gain as much as possible (pleonexy).

On the contrary, Callicles asserts, the principle of unlimited profits and possessions is real justice. In the animal realm as well as among humans, the rule of the stronger over the weaker is supreme. In the world of ignorance and destruction—both in Plato's time and in ours—the economic standard is vulture capitalism. 9

"Civil government, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all."

Adam Smith. (1776). *Wealth of Nations*

According to Callicles—and the vulture capitalists of our time—a man has no need for self-discipline. On the contrary, goodness and justice consist in the satisfaction of any and every desire.
"Luxury, license and freedom' (tryphe, akolasia, eleutheria), if provided with means, are virtue and happiness (arete, eudaimonia); whatever is said to the contrary is the ornamental talk of worthless men."

Callicles in Plato's Gorgias, (492c)

Pointing out how the same words have entirely different meanings in the world of truth and the world of delusion, Plato defines goodness and badness in terms of advancing or degrading the order of a society. A statesman is good if under his rule the citizens become better; he is bad if under his rule the citizens become worse, in terms of their everyday life and their moral fiber.

As we must do in understanding our modern society, Socrates reviews the men who were the pride of Athenian history: Themistocles, Pericles, Cimon, Miltiades. Applying his criteria he finds that they were bad statesmen in the sense of building the infrastructure of the city, but ignoring justice and temperance. The conclusive proof for the evil character of their rule is what Athenian citizens have become. The present corrupt generation of Athenians, Plato says, is heir to the evils that have accumulated through the successive rule of such supposedly "great" statesmen.

Such an analysis and indictment of the "founding fathers"--of Athens or the United States--is the height of patriotism: the assessment of what has been done and what must be revised and what perpetuated and extended. The current condition of American society--with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer--is an indictment of the plutocratic nature of the American Constitution, as created by a small cabal at the beginning of our nation.

The Laser of Discernment Within Plato's Dialogues

The structure of Plato's dialogues indicates their genius: we gain an understanding of fundamental concepts by bringing into dialectical juxtaposition the most potent ideas of the false world and the best ideas of the world of truth. At present, we must work assiduously to understand precisely what are the bases of the world of tyranny as conceived and practiced by the demonic cabal, since in most instances they hide or obfuscate their basic tactics and strategies.

One of the few positive benefits of watching TV "news" programs is to sharpen our capacities to see through the lies which the cabal members broadcast to the public. Our struggle against the current world of ignorance and destruction must include discernment of what it is they are hiding and making the truth available to those who wish to understand.

From this aspect of Plato's thought and activity we gain the insight that genuine philosophy is not the preaching of right doctrines, but continuous effort to identify and analyze the forces of good and evil. A large part of our effort is to train the soul to
recognize the shape and substance of the world of untruth and, consequently, understand how we must work in opposite ways to discern the truth and effect beneficent change.

Philosophy does not exist in a social vacuum, but in opposition to the world of tyranny. Justice is not defined in the abstract but in opposition to the concrete forms which injustice assumes in our time. In *The Commonwealth* (often mistranslated as *The Republic*), Plato was not creating an "ideal order" of a city state, but discovering the elements of right order in concrete opposition to the elements of disorder in the surrounding society. Plato explains that just as the principles of right order for a city-state are discovered in combat against the fundamental principles of tyranny, so the forms (*eidos*) of virtue in the soul are discovered in opposition to the many forms of disorder in the soul.

Philosophy illuminates truth by opposing it to untruth, perpetuating the tradition of Perennialist sages who discover and disseminate truth in their resistance to the false dogmas of their time. As in Plato's experience, so with us, philosophy involves the new embodiment of the truths of the Perennial Tradition under extremely anarchic and chaotic conditions. Between the age of Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Heraclitus and the age of Plato there had occurred a century of sophistic moral and political degeneration, just as in American society the demonic cabal has for a century deliberately worked to destroy our culture.

Genuine philosophers arise in opposition to sophists—those who teach and direct the destruction of society. A genuine philosopher develops a contemporary concept of justice for the purpose of opposing the current sophistic disorder; the meaning of fundamental realities such as justice and truth must be understood in relation to their opposites within a specific era.

Plato defined disorder in the world of tyranny as *polypragmosyne*, the seizing of power by those who presume they possess wisdom in all things. In modern terms, this has been clearly illustrated in the case of the demonic cabal, which assumes that it has the understanding of how Americans—and the world—ought to order their lives and therefore possesses the mandate to seize control of American society and the world. What *polypragmosyne* means in practice is that the unskilled, unenlightened, and depraved seize the rule of a society to its detriment and final destruction.

When the same principle of disorder (*polypragmosyne*) is applied to the soul, it refers to appetites and desires directing the course of human action and claiming the rulership of the soul which properly belongs to wisdom. True justice (*dikaiosyne*), on the other hand, covers right order at all levels—the harmony of the soul and society.

We gain exceptional insight from Plato's concepts as we examine our own world of untruth. And we retain the concreteness of Plato's thought by translating his terms in reference to current examples of corruption. We can, for example, identify certain modern tyrants in direct reference to Plato's dialogues: David Rockefeller as Cephalus, Karl Rove as Gorgias, Kissinger as Callicles, Dubya as Polus, etc.

Plato quite accurately included the purveyors of popular culture—what we would today identify as the world of mindless TV and barbaric movies—with the sophists as the
source of disorder in the soul and society. To restore order to the deranged souls of the world of untruth, we must begin at the strategic point of the “ignorance of the soul” by setting aright the relation between man and his Higher Self. This is the problem which dominates *The Commonwealth* as a whole; the attack on the corrupt society is not directed against this or that political abuse but against a general disease of the soul.

Philosophy, in Plato's time and ours, comes into being as the resistance of the soul to its destruction by a deranged world. Philosophy, as the continuing, most effective embodiment of the Perennial Tradition, possesses two distinct expressions:

- A process of evoking the right Forms and their re-establishment in our souls, constituting a process of self-regeneration for ourselves and others
- The organic development of the substantive core of a new commonwealth which, by its existence, overcomes and relieves the pressure of the surrounding corrupt society

"Every one of Plato's dialogues is a protreptic because its purpose is to aid the reader in affectively identifying with his own intelligence. The philosophical dialogue never addresses the reader solely as a solitary individual, but always as a member of a free, self-governing, political community. The irony of Socrates and the dialectic method of Plato are in the service of the protreptic."

Emil J. Piscitelli, "In Praise of Love: A Conversation With Plato's Symposium"

**Plato's New Commonwealth**

At the end of *The Commonwealth*, Socrates tells Glaukon that the moral principles of virtue and order, applying to both the soul and the society, will not likely be actualized in the world of untruth, but they're already realized in a higher realm of supersensual communion.

"He will gladly take part in and enjoy those which he thinks will make him a better man, but in public and private life he will shun those that may overthrow the established habit of his soul."

"'Then, if that is his chief concern,' he said, 'he will not willingly take part in politics.'"

"'Yes, by the dog,' said I, 'in his own city he certainly will, yet perhaps not in the city of his birth, except in some providential conjuncture.'"

"'I understand,' he said; 'you mean the city whose establishment we have
described, the city whose home is in the ideal; for I think that it can be found nowhere on earth.'"

"'Well,' said I, 'perhaps there is a form of it laid up in the spiritual domain for him who wishes to contemplate it and so beholding to constitute himself its citizen. But it makes no difference whether it exists now or ever will come into physical reality. The politics of this supersensual city only will be his and of none other.'"

Plato is the founder of a supersensual community of philosophers--truth-seekers--that lives through the ages. Socrates and Plato maintain the sovereignty of this higher realm through their creation of an entire way of life--philosophia: the love of and the search for wisdom.

"Follow me then, and I will lead you where you will be happy in life and after death, as dialectic reveals. And never mind if some one despises you as a fool, and insults you, if he has a mind; let him strike you, by Zeus, and do you be of good cheer, and do not mind the insulting blow, for you will never come to any harm in the practise of virtue, if you are a really good and true man. When we have practised virtue together, we will apply ourselves to politics, if that seems desirable, or we will advise about whatever else may seem good to us, for we shall be better able to judge then. In our present condition we ought not to give ourselves airs, for even on the most important subjects we are always changing our minds; so utterly stupid are we! Let us, then, adopt dialectic as our methodology, which has revealed to us that the best way of life is to practise justice and every virtue in life and death. This way let us go; and in this exhort all men to follow..."

Plato, The Commonwealth

Only philosophers gain awareness of and participation in this supersensual commonwealth, because only they possess the intellectual and spiritual qualities which make this possible. For example, our disturbing passions must be restrained by Sophrosyne: excellence of character and soundness of mind combined in a well-balanced personality. If egomania and greed are unrestrained, we will lead the life of a predator, one who loots everyone, friend or foe.

"Such a man cannot be the friend (prophiles) of God or other men, for he is incapable of communion, and who is incapable of communion is incapable of friendship (philia) (507e)."

Philia, fidelity to oneself and others, is a prerequisite for entry into the higher community. Philia is the effectual bond between humans and between Heaven and Earth, God and man. It is because fidelity (philia) and order pervade true reality that the universe is a cosmos--an ordered realm--and not an anarchical chaos (akosmia, akolasia).

The Socratic-Platonic supersensual community has been created by their lives and teachings--and by subsequent Perennialist adepts. Socrates revealed by his actions and his
words that a true philosopher constantly practices the art of living in the soul apart from the body. By realizing our unity with the Higher Self, we gain an awareness of Forms: principles of being. There will be a few just and honorable men in the terrestrial realm—such as Aristedes, son of Lysimachus, during Plato's day—but most of the dwellers in the supersensual commonwealth will be those who have lived before us.

Over against this higher spiritual domain of the community of philosophers stands the world of delusion, oppression, and obliteration. Members of this evil world, such as Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles—Rockefeller, Bush II, and Kissinger—stand convicted as the accomplices of tyrannical murderers and destroyers of their society. These monsters represent a depraved disorder, and no one should credit their words or follow their decrees.

The genuine authority of public order lies with Socrates and Plato—and modern philosophers who follow in the same tradition. The personal and social Forms advocated by Plato have survived Athens and are still the most important norms in the traditions of Western civilization. While society at any given time seems to be the last judge of what is right and who is important, history proves that certain individuals are more important—and more correct in their judgements—than the entire society during their lives (history, of course, as truly interpreted by genuine philosophers, not popular "historians").

The assumption of power by Socrates and Plato is a genuine spiritual revolution. It is much different from most social revolutions in which new political forces struggle for power against older ones. Plato's revolution is a radical call to spiritual regeneration. Most of the people of Athens—and most of the people of twenty-first century America—have lost their souls. All they can do is lead lives of unquiet desperation, destroying everything of value. A deranged Athenian democracy can kill a man physically—as with Socrates—but this act is seen to have no moral authority. The lone philosopher overcame the tyranny of his time and the supersensual community of philosophers—living and dead—overcomes tyranny throughout time.

"Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number—
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you—
Ye are many—they are few."

Percy Bysshe Shelley, The Mask of Anarchy
1 See the author's recently published book, *The Perennial Tradition*

2 "Greek philosophy is autochthonous [An entity depicted as having originated from the ground it inhabits, from itself; hence of independent origin]. That Plato traveled in Egypt need not be doubted, but that he went to Phoenicia, Chaldaea, and Persia to study philosophy is mere guesswork. What Plato thought of the Egyptians he has told us himself in *The Republic* (436) when he says that the special characteristic of the Greeks is love of knowledge, of the Phoenicians and Egyptians love of money. If he borrowed no money, he certainly borrowed no philosophy from his Egyptian friends."

   Max Muller. *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, 1893

3 Some Greek sources assert that Pythagoras referred to his system of thought as *philosophia*. Plato appears to have studied Pythagoreanism—as well as other systems of thought—and probably drew on those other schools to develop his own methodologies which he called *philosophia*. We have only scattered bits of Pythagoras' ideas. Plato's writings are the basis of what we can identify as the essence of philosophy.

4 Tyranny: oppressive power unrestrained by law or moral principles
Tyrant: an absolute ruler unrestrained by law or constitution who exercises power oppressively or brutally, a usurper of sovereignty

5 "Even now so much of the thought which has the best title to be called philosophical is contained in the works of authors who are primarily students of a science other than philosophy—theologians, mathematicians, natural scientists, or Platonic and Aristotelian scholars—as might well give a colour to the suspicion that philosophy is not itself a science at all, but a certain critical spirit or synoptic habit of mind, which can be exercised and developed only in the pursuit of a study other than itself."

   M. B. Foster, *The Political Philosophies of Plato and Hegel*

   Also, see Chapter Eleven, "*Philosophia: The Love of and the Search for Wisdom,*" in the author's book, *The Perennial Tradition*.

6 "The post-philosophical attack on Plato's legacy relies principally on the doctrine, now virtually a universal belief, that thought is really no more than language and philosophical discourse no more than a certain type of language-use. Heidegger's generation would insist philosophy turn to semiotics as a means of resolving ontological and other issues. Derrida would go even further toward a strict identification of philosophy with language. 'Philosophy is first and foremost writing', he declares, 'though a peculiar kind of writing whose effect is to isolate the signified from its sensory verbal signifier, thereby to generate an illusory realm of meaning independent of language, the so-called world of spirit, thought and ideas.'"

   Francis L. Jackson, The Post-Philosophical Attack on Plato
"Ambivalence with respect to terms like 'spirit' or 'spiritual' pervades the whole tradition represented by Nietzsche and Heidegger. Like most post-Hegelians they were generally loathe to use the word except disparagingly; yet they were equally clear the crisis they would describe and address was a 'spiritual' one, in the sense it was at once intellectual, moral, political, aesthetic, religious - i.e., 'cultural'. The new worldliness to which they would lead the return is not a materialism but wholly presupposes a concrete freedom: 'spirit' in the distinctively Hegelian sense. Heidegger himself will declare "World is always the world of spirit", but see Derrida's revealing account as to how he continually vacillated over whether or how to use the term: whether negatively, positively, figuratively etc. Of Spirit, Heidegger and the Question, tr. Bennington/Bowlby, 1989). Ibid.

See the author's recently published book Progressive Awareness.

In the seventeenth century CE, the problem of pleonexy (vulture capitalism) reappeared. Locke propagated pleonexy as conventional justice; he institutionalized the "desire to have more than the other man" by transforming government into a protective agency for the gains of pleonexy.

There is nothing more absurd than a Henry Kissinger, a Zbigniew Brzezinski, or a Paul Wolfowitz--mandarins of the demonic cabal--pontificating on how the world ought be run. The supposedly superior groups of foreign policy advisors--Council on Foreign Relations, Trilateral Commission, Bilderberg group--are farcical in their presumption of knowledge and understanding.

Protreptic discourse: both directive and didactic but also associated with rational inquiry, in which minds are directed toward an instructive purpose

The Greek words referring to this spiritual domain are: theia tis sumbêi tuchê

- theia: spiritual
- tis: any one, any thing, some one, some thing
- sumbêi: communion
- tuchê: the good which man obtains
Chapter Sixteen: How Philosophy Vanquishes Ignorance

The hideous visage of evil is clearly perceptible in our time. Behind it lurks the perpetual conspiracy of ignorance, threatening to overwhelm all noble elements of human culture. At present, the flood of ignorance endangers the very foundations of civilization.

**Ignorance Kills**

Ignorance is not merely the lack of knowledge, but self-destructive turning away from truth in all areas of life. Persons develop a taste for ignorance, the predisposition to embrace erroneous beliefs based on presumption or mere authority. The ignorant person believes he knows what he actually doesn't know; he becomes delusional. He is deranged.

We find it difficult to understand how people today deliberately refuse to look at what is actually happening in the world, believing the lies and distortions their leaders tell them. With a straight face, political, economic, religious, and media figures tell the people that black is white, war is peace, lies are truths, joblessness is economic recovery, ignorance is intelligence.

"While in our private life nobody except a mad person would remain passive in view of a threat to our total existence, those who are in charge of public affairs do practically nothing, and those who have entrusted their fate to them let them continue to do nothing.

"How is it possible that the strongest of all instincts, that for survival, seems to have ceased to motivate us? One of the most obvious explanations is that the leaders undertake many actions that make it possible for them to pretend they are doing something effective to avoid a catastrophe: endless conferences, resolutions, disarmament talks, all give the impression that the problems are recognized and something is being done to resolve them. Yet nothing of real importance happens; but both the leaders and the led anesthetize their consciences and their wish for survival by giving the appearance of knowing the road and marching in the right direction."

Erich Fromm. (1976). *To Have or To Be?*

Throughout history, ignorance has destroyed millions of lives:
• Lives lost in idle pursuit of wealth and pleasure, with no thought for others
• Lives lost in senseless wars
• Lives lost in criminal actions by rulers
• Lives lost because people cannot secure essential human necessities

Clearly, we must gain an understanding of this pandemic of ignorance. What is its nature? From where does it spring? How does it lead to evils of all kinds?

The Nature of Ignorance

The worst feature of ignorance, Plato tells us, is self-satisfaction. "For herein is the evil of ignorance, that he who is neither good nor wise is nevertheless satisfied with himself: he has no desire for that of which he feels no want." (Symposium)

Self-love, Plato recognizes, sees its own ignorance as wisdom; it seeks no cure, "the soul wallowing in the mire of every sort of ignorance and by reason of lust becomes the principal accomplice in her own captivity." (Phaedo) It will not let a more competent person perform what he can.

Ignorance can only be overcome by an outside force of true wisdom.

Plato describes ignorance as the "greatest of diseases" and says that "the excessive love of self is in reality the source in each man of all offences; for the lover is blinded about the beloved, so that he judges wrongly of the just, the good, and the honorable, and thinks that he ought always to prefer himself to the truth." (Phaedo)

"The narcissistic orientation is one in which one experiences as real only that which exists within oneself, while the phenomena in the outside world have no reality in themselves, but are experienced only from the viewpoint of their being useful or dangerous to one. The opposite pole to narcissism is objectivity; it is the faculty to see people and things as they are, objectively, and to be able to separate this objective picture from a picture which is formed by one's desires and fears."

Erich Fromm. The Art of Loving

Ignorance of the true value of things and people leads us to deal only with our illusions of these elements, not what they really are. We chase false values, wasting our lives, experiencing misfortunes brought on by incorrect thinking and behavior.
Plato distinguished clearly between "simple ignorance," the mere lack of information, and "double ignorance," the absence of knowledge coupled with the delusion of having genuine knowledge.

"Ignorance may be conveniently divided by the legislator into two sorts: there is simple ignorance, which is the source of lighter offences, and double ignorance, which is accompanied by a conceit of wisdom; and he who is under the influence of the latter fancies that he knows all about matters of which he knows nothing."

Plato, *Laws*

The doubly ignorant person believes not only that he knows everything but that he can do everything. His ignorance keeps the truth from others and his incompetent assumption of authority keeps out those truly qualified to lead. Throughout human history--including the present time--humankind has experienced the horror of rulers who are doubly-ignorant, destroying the very foundation principles of civilized society.

"And surely struggle against him we must in every possible way who would annihilate knowledge and reason and mind, and yet ventures to speak confidently about anything."

Plato, *Phaedo*

Through reliance on the preachments of others and on our own unfounded opinions, we construct a delusory physical and social world. Plato claimed that our customary consciousness constructs a confusing chimera--a world of illusion.

"What again shall we say of the actual acquisition of knowledge?--is the body, if invited to share in the inquiry, a hinderer or a helper? I mean to say, have sight and hearing any truth in them? Are they not, as the poets are always telling us, inaccurate witnesses? and yet, if even they are inaccurate and indistinct, what is to be said of the other senses?--for you will allow that they are the best of them?

"For in attempting to consider anything in company with the body she is obviously deceived."

Plato, *Phaedo*
It's difficult to understand just what Plato is getting at when he says our senses deceive us, creating a delusory world. Clearly, the ordinary universe of red queens and non-flying pigs is a coherent system to which we all consent, allowing us to build better bombs as well as more effective means of self-transformation.

Part of what Plato is referring to is that if we are to break through to a higher understanding, we must somehow stop this "big blooming buzzing confusion" (as William James called it) and leap to an entirely discontinuous mode of experience.

What Plato is speaking of is the dogmatic certainty we all share that our interpretation of reality is the only true interpretation. We become so inured to consensus reality, that we're unable to discern its fabricated nature: a world put together by our minds out of sense impressions.

Plato points to the same element that appears in all Perennialist teachings in which the initiate is forced to learn a new description of the world in a total sense and pit it against the old description, breaking the bewitchment of his ordinary sense of reality.

Employing extraordinary procedures when he interacted with people, Socrates stopped their world:

- Encouraging them to see their ignorance of their own ignorance
- Encouraging them to see the delusory nature of their sense world

Achieving a glimpse of wisdom reveals how much more ignorance one has to overcome, how much more there is to understand and practice. Socrates could honestly say of himself that the range of his ignorance grew in proportion to the extent of his awareness.

Socrates produced a definite psychic upheaval in his fellow-participants in Dialectic by helping them to see that they not only did not know what they thought they knew, they also were ignorant of their own ignorance in this regard.

A Perennialist sage met a ruler.
The ruler said: "If you wish, you may ask a favor of me."
The sage replied: "I cannot seek favors from a slave of my slaves."
"How is that?" asked the ruler.
The sage replied: "I have two slaves who are your masters: greed and self-love."

To immature people, someone helping them to become aware of their own ignorance doesn't seem to be help, but ridicule. Such assistance in recognizing their incorrect
Because contemporary "philosophy" is merely the husk of what it once was with Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, we find it difficult to realize that for Plato the search for wisdom was no mere intellectual pursuit but a total way of life. Each of Plato's dialogues was a part of his teaching in regard to the pursuit of wisdom; the Republic, for example, was the investigation into what was the best way for humans and nations to order their lives, and how the philosopher tries to bring about that state of affairs.

"But by far the worst feature of this 'double ignorance' is that, on the one hand, it stands in the way of its own cure, and on the other, if unchecked, it is constantly aggravating itself. For if we look at things with a distorted view, these things will present themselves to us in a distorted manner too; and thus, instead of reaping from our experiences new impressions which might help us in restoring a healthy spirit within ourselves, we shall only add nourishment to the ulcer within our mind. And on the other side, if we should try to cure our ignorance, we see that for so doing it is required that we look away from ourselves and from our habitual ways of thinking, which seems to us tantamount to a flat repudiation of our very selves and consequently impossible."

Hermann Gauss, Plato's Conception of Philosophy, 1974

Genuine seekers of wisdom possess a deep, sincere love of truth, relentlessly striving for it. This dedication to truth means that they do not accept any conventional belief or custom without examining it and determining if it has some form of verification or value.

They do not presume to have apprehended fully-formed, final truth, but are always "reaching forth unto those things which are before." Along with the love of truth, a true philosopher such as Socrates wages an unending struggle against error and ignorance wherever it's found.

Plato recognizes that there are some kinds of humans who have no interest in the search for wisdom:

- Those who have already achieved wisdom, "whether Gods or men"
- Those "who are ignorant to the extent of being evil"

Those who have need of philosophy are "those who have the misfortune to be ignorant, but are not yet hardened in their ignorance, or void of understanding, and do not as yet fancy that they know what they do not know." (Lysis)
The doubly-ignorant person not only views things in a distorted way but possesses no capacity for self-correction; no truth can get through the delusory mind-set. Delusion feeds on itself and becomes a totally closed system of egomania.

**Overcoming the Fatal Malady of Ignorance**

Ignorance leads to death; the ignorant become like dead persons. This is no mere metaphor, as you discover by carefully observing persons who have committed themselves to ignorance and falsehood. They stumble through their phantom lives, their speech and behavior are incoherent and emotionally flattened. Embracing ignorance kills that element in humans which motivates them to turn to the truth and take pleasure in knowledge and learning.

"Wisdom is the life of the heart, which delivers it from the death of ignorance."

Thaqafi (Perennialist adept)

The wise teacher is able to bring the ignorant back from the dead by showing them their fatal maladies which led them to embrace falsehood and deliberately turn away from truth. The teacher encourages persons overcome by ignorance to begin to investigate their fatal disorders and overcome them.

The very act of acknowledging their ignorance is the beginning of the recovery of a true life, recognizing that ignorance is a form of death. The teacher shows them how exciting and rewarding the discovery of truth can be and how enabling knowledge is. Only when these persons begin to recover, are they able to appreciate how ill they were.

"Give me more of this medicine because it has cured my malady, and my hope and desire to answer my problem is now intensified. And save me by your kindly treatment and your gentle wisdom from the confusion which you know so well to be hidden in my secret soul, from those deadly disorders concealed within me. In the past up till now there was concealed from me those hidden things within me which I denied. You have revealed them to me by your excellent description of them. . . ."

"And with the limited knowledge at my disposal I realize how very much more there is to be known which I have not attained. There are recondite and hidden mysteries which I have neither seen nor known. So, O wise man, reveal to me my present spiritual state which you know better than I do. For surely the physician knows more about the ailment of the sick man than the sick man himself, and is in a better position to diagnose the cause of the illness and prescribe the treatment to cure him."

*Junayd, Rasail*
It is only if we understand ignorance in this light that we can feel its deadly force. Ignorance is not some harmless lack of the opportunity to gain information. It is, as Plato says, a fundamental corruption in which "all evils are rooted." In today's world, as has happened throughout man's past, we have the misfortune to see our culture being steadily destroyed by persons who are not only ignorant but whose ignorance has steadily corrupted them to the point of evil.

The perfidious, destructive nature of ignorance is such that the beginning of a cure can only be administered through a very powerful psychic shock: the stopping of one's world.

This can sometimes come about, as with Socrates, through Dialectic, when the person is confronted with his own delusions. He is made to see that what he believes he knows he does not actually know; that what he believes are truths are in fact delusions. This can sometimes produce sufficient psychic upheaval that it will stop his usual world of self-justification and presumptuousness.

Certainly, this kind of psychic shock from Socrates appears to have been what turned Plato's life upside down, leading him from a public life as an artist and a politician to a dedicated philosopher (seeker of wisdom). Socrates' single act of stopping Plato's world—providing him with the requisite psychic upheaval—is one of the most important accomplishments of this esteemed Perennialist teacher.

In the very process of searching for wisdom—the Golden Way of philosophy—seekers vanquish ignorance, learning how to respond to the challenges of their lives. The shock of recognizing their own ignorance awakens them to an awareness of the deeper realities of human existence.

But very often the only psychic shock that produces a stopping of the delusory world is catastrophe or crisis. As Benjamin Franklin reminded us, "Experience is a dear teacher, and only fools will learn from no other."
Chapter Seventeen: How Philosophy Overcomes Propaganda

"See in my line of work you got to keep repeating things over and over and over again for the truth to sink in, to kind of catapult the propaganda."

George W. Bush

In this chapter, we'll explore how the embodiment of the Perennial Tradition called philosophy overcomes indoctrination, brainwashing, and conditioning. Every advanced teacher within the Perennial Tradition has provided insight into how false communication-propaganda, lies, deception, and mind-control--can be defeated.

Of all the varied embodiments of the Perennial Tradition, Plato's writings constitute the most potent, comprehensive, and detailed exposition of that tradition still extant. Through study of Plato's works, we'll discover how philosophy overcomes falsifying, indoctrinating communication.

"Plato's is . . . a philosophy of catharsis, ascent, realization, transformation of the way of feeling, of willing, of acting. Plato uses philosophy as a method for raising us above the conflict-ridden and contradictory world of the sensible to the harmonious world of Being, which is our original home."

Raphael, Initiation Into the Philosophy of Plato

The Mild-Mannered Plato

To the unaware, Plato's dialogues appear to be mere verbal discussions of philosophical terms by Socrates and his fellow participants. They're actually disguised dynamos containing hidden potency: fundamental realities constitutive of human existence, such as goodness, beauty, and virtue (truth, justice and the American way included).
Plato's writings help us to understand that the chasm between us and arcane reality is not entirely bridgeable by ordinary sensation and thought. Naive realism assumes that we see, hear, feel, touch, or taste this reality and thereby know its true and complete essence. This view fails to take into cognizance the many "filters" between us and the enigmatic reality.

Part of what Plato's dialogues reveal is how widespread ignorance of reality actually is, how extensive and common the delusion is that we understand reality because we sense something we call "the external world" and act on it in ways which seem to prove that we have a complete grasp of its essence. We fail to recognize the myriad distorting elements between us and reality, assuming that our naive interpretation of the external world brings complete comprehension.

Plato's dialogues only make sense to persons who have committed themselves to the search for wisdom (philosophy), because they've recognized that there are vast continents of ignorance within their psyche which they need to illuminate and eradicate. Only if they have an intense desire to understand the veiled aspects of reality will Plato's philosophy have any appeal for them.

Throughout the dialogues, Socrates claims that he is ignorant of the concepts and entities being investigated. Academic pedants, pretending to understand what Plato is doing in this regard, misinterpret Socrates as merely pretending to be ignorant when he isn't pretending at all.

"We should recognize that Socrates is being ironic when he fains [sic] ignorance about moral matters. He is simply pretending not to understand in order to draw out the person with whom he is arguing. By posing as ignorant, Socrates is able to seduce others into making moral claims, and then is able to show them how little they actually know about the topic being discussed." 2

What Does Socrates' Ignorance Mean?

Socrates did not pretend to be ignorant; he maintained that his means of investigation--Dialectic--lead him to discover ever larger areas of reality which he didn't understand. In his defense at his trial for his life, Socrates stated that what set him apart from others is that he recognized that he didn't know when he didn't know, whereas others assumed they knew things which they didn't actually know.

This was not some ironic pretense of ignorance. When we honestly seek wisdom--beyond mere sensory information--then we constantly discover how much more there is that we don't know. We may achieve an understanding of a particular area of reality (a spot of light in a forest), but this also involves our becoming aware of how much more there is about us that we don't yet understand (the forest surrounding the spot of light).
When Socrates claims ignorance he is doing several things:

- Saying: "I do not know the answer to the question you are assuming is the goal of this inquiry; you must get an answer to such questions from those who specialize in those kinds of issues: the sophists or the popular artists (like Homer)."

- Saying: "I am constantly seeking (through Dialectic) to understand mysterious and transcendent realities, so I cannot claim to already understand them."

Along with a complete misunderstanding of Socrates' ignorance, most academic professor/sophists misapprehend the arcane science of Dialectic, as evidenced in the quotations below.

"In Plato's early dialogues, the method of argumentation that Socrates uses is called the elenchos (eh-len-k-uh)s sic) or examination. In these dialogues we rarely find Socrates lecturing or directly answering the questions; instead we find him asking questions of others in an attempt to lead them indirectly to the truth.

"Typically Socrates will ask someone who claims to be an expert to define a moral term that he is using--the nature of piety, courage, friendship or justice, for example. He then proceeds to demonstrate that the definition that has been given is inadequate or contradictory. This leads the person with whom he is arguing to come up with other definitions, which, though more adequate, are also shown to be problematic. Most of Plato's early dialogues end inconclusively, with the person being interrogated by Socrates at a complete loss to know what he believes about the topic.

"So what is the point of the elenchos if it simply leads the person being questioned to end up more confused than he started? The answer is that Socrates' method serves both a negative as well as a positive function. Negatively, Socrates is attempting to show the individual with whom he is arguing that the view which he holds is untenable.

"On the positive side his goal is to move closer to the eidos or universal definition of the thing being spoken about. In the Euthyphro, for example, the subject matter is piety, so he is looking for the eidos of piety---a standard for determining which actions are pious or impious in all circumstances. Once we have this standard, he believes, we will possess certain knowledge [episteme] about right and wrong/good and bad/vice and virtue. And with this knowledge, he is convinced that happiness is all but inevitable." ¹

It's no wonder that academic philosophy is in such bad repute today. The disgraceful misunderstanding of Plato is a clear symptom of confusion.
The True Nature of Dialectic: Participatory Inquiry

A discerning study of Plato’s dialogues reveals that the process of dialectic does not involve Socrates "interrogating" or "leading the interlocutors indirectly to the truth." The dialogues do not end with the participant "at a complete loss to know what he believes about the topic" or with Socrates "attempting to show the individual with whom he is arguing that the view which he holds is untenable." The participant may have discovered, in the dialectic process, that he does not actually know what he first assumed he knew. But he will also have learned something of the essence of the reality which was investigated.

Platonic dialogues invite seekers to participate in the maieutic (midwifery) psychagogy (illumination of the soul) that constitutes Dialectic. For students to be interested in a particular dialogue, they must have an advanced awareness of the critical nature of the issues and concepts involved. The first step seekers take in entering into the dimension of higher awareness involved in Dialectic is to bring a specific dialogue into their present, personal world, feeling an intense desire to investigate the profound issues and concepts involved.

"The philosophic endeavor, as represented by Plato, begins when we are faced with a value problem, that is, with a difficulty which requires our attention because it appears insoluble according to our current values. Philosophy proper starts with the realization that our values are inadequate to the situation we face, and it proceeds to search for new and better ones." ²

The Cratylus: Communication and Truth

In the dialogue we'll explore in this chapter, the Cratylus, we find that the dialectical process leads Socrates and the other participants into the profound issues of the nature of truth and how words disclose a reality which is mysterious and arcane. ³ Any discerning person knows that these issues are of critical importance in the modern world of propaganda, pre-emptive war, and tyranny.

At a time when millions of Americans fail to see the evil of the criminal cabal and its puppet juntas, rediscovery of the insights of the Platonic philosophy--enabling us to overcome propaganda and brainwashing--is of crucial importance: our personal and social lives depend on it.

In an era of mass propaganda, deception, and murder--of American soldiers and Afghans and Iraqis--what might appear mere "philosophical" issues, such as truth and dialectic, can now be seen to be critical powers of discernment we must develop if we're to survive.
In our study of the *Cratylus*, we'll examine these crucial issues:

- Does everything have a right name of its own, which comes by nature?
- Is a name whatever people call a thing by agreement?
- Is there a kind of inherent correctness in names, which is the same for all people?
- Can the truth about these or any topics be gained by studying with self-appointed experts (academics or sophists)?

We begin the dialectical process by relating these issues to present difficulties. We can legitimately call George W. Bush's statement in his State of the Union speech a *lie* when he said: "There are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq." There were no weapons of mass destruction—as determined by American weapons inspectors themselves. So Bush *lied*.

The issues can become clouded only if we allow the Bush junta propagandists to operate without challenge. We must set the terms of discourse, not allowing the Bush indoctrinators to define the issues or the concepts. The terms we're investigating possess commonly acknowledged meanings:

1. To lie: 4
   - to express an inaccurate or false statement
   - to convey an untruth
   - to make an untrue statement which may or may not be believed by the speaker

2. A lie:
   - an untrue or inaccurate statement that may or may not be believed true by the speaker
   - something that misleads or deceives
   - something intended or serving to convey a falsehood

3. Truth: 5
   - conformity to fact or actuality
   - reality, actuality
   - that which is considered to be the supreme reality and to have the ultimate meaning and value of existence

Karl Rove and his legion of falsifiers and deceivers (throughout the mainstream media outlets, all owned by right-wing extremists) make such statements as these:

- "A statement is not a lie if it was caused by incomplete or false information."
- "I don't believe Bush lied."
- "Bush misspoke— but he didn't lie."
- "Bush didn't intend to deceive, so what he said wasn't a lie."
The purpose of all these Bush junta obfuscations is to redefine a lie as the truth. The statement Bush II made in his State of the Union address was untrue: there were no weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Bush lied. It doesn't matter if there were—or weren't—inaccurate or false intelligence reports about the WMDs; Bush's statement was still a deliberate lie.

It is of no significance what Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity feel about whether or not Bush lied; their feelings don't change the fact that Bush lied. Lying doesn't necessarily involved the intent to deceive; if a statement served to convey a falsehood it is a lie. We can't know what Dubya's intentions were, since those are subjective (and he doesn't have the moral fiber to admit them), but from his track record the most compelling hypothesis would be that he knew he was lying and intended to deceive the American people into an unnecessary, murderous war.

Any person interested in being honest has the responsibility of determining if what he says is true. If you don't know whether something is true or false, then you indicate that you don't know and make it clear that you're merely putting forward a likely hypothesis (as in the paragraph above). That is not what Dubya did. He deliberately and expressly made a statement which was false—and which he knew to be false.

Socrates' Approach to Dialectic

In the Cratylus, Socrates makes it clear, through humor, that he believes the essence of truth and communication cannot be gained by merely listening to or studying with the "experts." In his day, the self-appointed "experts" in communication were the sophists. So Socrates says that he does not know the ultimate reality of truth and communication because he only had enough money for the cheaper course offered by one of the sophists.

"Now if I had attended Prodicus' fifty-drachma course of lectures, after which, as he himself says, a man has a complete education on this subject, there would be nothing to hinder your learning the truth about the correctness of names at once; but I have heard only the one-drachma course, and so I do not know what the truth is about such matters."

"However," Socrates says, "I am ready to join you and Cratylus in looking for it," that is, the essence of truth and naming. Socrates is joining the discussion, while recognizing that Hermogenes and Cratylus are assuming that:

- The real question is the truth or correctness of names; are they "natural" or conventional?
- The truth about this or any topic can be gained by studying with self-appointed experts: the sophists
- The discussion is a debate as to whether Hermogenes or Cratylus is right.
Socrates recognizes that in dialectic one must start with whoever is engaged in the investigation, whatever incorrect assumptions they bring to the endeavor. Socrates is saying that he is always ready to engage in the mystical science of Dialectic (maieutic psychagogy). However, in the course of this dialogue, the goal of their investigation will soon be determined to be not the "correctness of names" but how words or names reveal a mysterious reality.

The Present Terms of Discourse

In the twenty-first century, we must make certain to set the field of inquiry and controvert the criminal cabal's deliberate prevarications and dissimulations such as:

- Bush is a great leader
- Bush started the Iraq war to bring democracy to the Iraqi people
- Americans must sacrifice their freedom for security
- The criminal cabal had no complicity in 9/11
- Spending over $1 trillion on the Iraq war is good for America
- Social Security is in genuine difficulty and Bush has only good intentions in trying to solve the problems
- Bush did not lie about weapons of mass destruction

The present enemies of truth and justice believe they can call a lie a truth; an aggressive, senseless, unnecessary war a struggle against terrorism; an illiterate moron a great leader; and the destruction of America through fascism, deficit spending and militarism, sound policies. They believe they can call anything whatever they want to and the American people will accept it.

"So essential is language to man's humanness, so deep a source is it of his own creativity, that it is by no means an accident in our time that those who have tried to degrade man and enslave him have first debased and misused language, arbitrarily turning meanings inside out."

Lewis Mumford. *The Conduct of Life*

We find the same kind of relativism and nominalism in the *Cratylus* in the person of Hermogenes: "For it seems to me that whatever name you give to a thing is its right name; and if you give up that name and change it for another, the later name is no less correct than the earlier, just as we change the names of our servants; for I think no name belongs to any particular thing by nature, but only by the habit and custom of those who employ it and who established the usage."

Hermogenes believed that a name can have one meaning for an individual and another for society, that names and values and realities are completely subjective: whatever a person believes they are, that is their true nature.
When trying to dialogue with persons in the present era, we must limit our efforts to persons committed to honesty and truth, asking the same question Socrates did in the Cratylus:

"Is there anything which you call speaking the truth and speaking falsehood—is there true speech and false speech?"

Dialogue is only possible with those persons who genuinely believe there is objective Truth—beyond personal belief, feeling, or desire.

At present, it would be impossible to dialogue with cabal junta members or any of their fellow-travelers (media propagandists and brain-dead, reactionary citizens), since they simply have no commitment to truth whatsoever. They will tell any lie and commit any atrocity which leads to their goals: power and wealth.

Even if one were the host of a radio or TV interview program, trying to dialogue with a person such as George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfield, Condoleezza Rice, John McCain, Hillary Clinton, or Barack Obama would be a total waste of time. Their entire output would be nothing but sophistry and propaganda: lies, obfuscations, and posturings.

A person like Hermogenes can believe that truth can be expressed in words without knowing how to express truth in words. But if a person doesn't believe there is a reality named "truth," then there is no purpose in engaging in Dialectic—searching for truth—when they don't believe there is truth.

Some people say they believe there is truth, when what they really believe is that each person's beliefs express an individual, subjective truth. This is the denial of the reality of Truth, which is invariable, not subjective, possessing a fixed reality of its own, as Socrates explains.

"It is clear that things have some fixed reality of their own, not in relation to us nor caused by us; they do not vary, swaying one way and another in accordance with our fancy, but exist of themselves in relation to their own reality imposed by nature." [386e]

**Words and Realities**

A horse, Socrates explains, is a horse, even if someone erroneously claims it is a man. And a human has a fixed nature, so it is incorrect to call a human a horse. Actions, such as cutting, are performed according to their own nature, not according to our opinion. If we want to perform the act of cutting, then we require a tool such as a knife.

Entities and actions have a fixed nature and are not subjective in the sense of having a reality relative to a person's beliefs. A name is, Socrates explains, an instrument for separating one kind of reality from another, a horse from a human, for example. Each
name refers to a fixed reality. Even if we change a name referring to a specific reality, the reality is the same.

If a propagandist such as Dubya or Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama or John McCain, with the clear intention of deceiving, gives the false name of democracy to the forms of government in America and Iraq, that person is still referring to the same, objective realities: American plutocracy (the rule of the wealthy) and Iraqi puppet government.

False and deceptive names are used by indoctrinators to try to fool heedless people into believing they're referring to a reality (true democracy: a government for the people) when they're not.

As Socrates, Cratylus, and Hermogenes continue in the dialogue, they come to recognize a truth they "did not know before, that names do possess a certain natural correctness, and that not every man knows how to give a name competently to anything whatsoever." [391b]

Most of the *Cratylus* is an exposition of Socrates demonstrating the chaos and adversity caused by scholastic etymologists, propagandists, and sophists. It's amazing to see supposedly intelligent persons who call themselves "philosophers" not recognizing that Socrates is exposing sophism. These dullards take Socrates' disproof of propaganda to be his setting out a serious system of analytic semantics. Plato makes it perfectly clear that Socrates is debunking etymology and propaganda, even having Socrates say: "you had better watch me and see that I don't play tricks on you. . ." [393d]

"Plato could hardly do more to discredit this investigation of names without actually stating in his own person that it is not to be taken seriously." 8

The search for truth is a serious matter, and Socrates is engaged in an earnest investigation into questions of critical importance--then and now. It's possible for a society to become so relativistic and intellectually bewildered that people lose the ability to comprehend reality. War is seen as peace. Tyranny is seen as sound government. A cabal selecting both Republican and Democratic candidates as a legitimate two-party system. Ignorance becomes suicidal. Intentional unawareness becomes lethal.

**Primordial Knowledge of Realities**

Part of what Socrates is investigating is the phenomenon of our possessing a knowledge of reality in our very being. Entities have a definite, unique composition; one thing is not another thing. We know, primordially, when we are in our right mind, whether a name correctly or incorrectly refers to a particular reality. Mind control, propaganda, and social conditioning can so corrupt the human mind that it does not function correctly; then false names are taken for true, our destroyers are taken for beneficent leaders. But
even when programmed by an oppressive regime, humans retain some connection to their primordial awareness of reality.

The American mind is very far gone: people suffer from generalized possession and hysteria the loss of the ability to use our senses and our minds. But there is still a preexistent, ineradicable power of understanding in even the most subverted personality that can be awakened.

There has to be this primordial ability to understand reality because we recognize when a name correctly or incorrectly refers to a particular entity. If we required knowledge of a name in order to recognize a reality, then we would never have been able to know realities prior to their having names and know when names are correct.

SOCRATES: But how could he [the original name-giver] have learned or discovered things from names if the primitive names were not yet given? For, if our conjecture is correct, the only way of learning and discovering things, is either to discover names for ourselves or to learn them from others.

CRATYLUS: I think that there is a good deal in what you say, Socrates.

SOCRATES: But if things are only to be known through names, how can we suppose that the givers of names had knowledge, or were legislators before there were names at all, and therefore before they could have known them?

One of the most profound conclusions of the dialectical investigation in the Cratylus is expressed by Socrates:

"How real existence is to be studied or discovered is, I suspect, too great a question for you or me to determine; but it is worth while to have reached even this conclusion, that real knowledge of things is not to be derived from names. No; they must be studied and investigated in themselves." [439c]

As we are critically aware at the present time, what name an entity is given is of supreme importance. If an element is given a false name then people believe it has the characteristics of the specious name:

- Iraq is a depository of weapons of mass destruction
- Terrorism is an enemy which will require American opposition for an indeterminate period of time
- The Patriot Act is an essential ingredient in the fight against terrorism

It's critically important to give the proper name to things; otherwise people accept the false names which the propagandists give them and act accordingly.
In the *Cratylus*, Socrates says that the man who knows how to properly ask and answer questions is a dialectician and one of the main things the dialectician asks questions about is the giving of true or false names to realities. The dialectician has the ability to recognize what the true reality of a thing is and make that apparent to people.

"The giving of names can hardly be, as you imagine, a trifling matter, or a task for trifling or casual persons: and Cratylus is right in saying that names belong to things by nature [390e] and that not every one is an artisan of names, but only he who keeps in view the name which belongs by nature to each particular thing and is able to embody its form in the letters and syllables."

At present, the dialectician—the genuine philosopher (seeker of wisdom)—asks crucial questions such as: "What is good government? In our ongoing American social dialogue, determining the true nature of the American Constitution remains a crucial issue. Since 1787, the American Constitution (signed by only 39 of the 55 members of the conspiratorial Constitutional Convention) has been thought to be a blueprint for good government. But in many ways and in many instances it has proven to be defective as a pattern of operation for good government. Especially is this so at the present time when a criminal cabal—and its Republican Party accomplices—have seized all branches of the federal government. So we must continue to seek for the Form of Good Government.

**The Reality of Forms**

Part of what Plato helps us understand is that there are ultimate realities to which names point, and that our responsibility in human life is to work toward an understanding and realization of these higher realities which Plato called Forms or Ideas.

As we examine instances of government, for example—America, Britain, fifth century BCE Athens, the 1776 Constitution of Pennsylvania—we find that none of them contains the total reality which we primordially know to be Good Government. Intuitively, we recognize that Good Government does not involve a leader lying to the people, a regime supporting only the rich and impoverishing the poor. With each investigation of a particular government, we find a specific aspect of the reality—Good Government—we apprehend in our inner being. Thus there must a complete totality, a wholeness—Good Government—to which the particulars point and which they embody partially. There must be Forms of which Plato spoke. Unless there were Forms, we could not name, since naming presupposes the existence of unchanging natures by reference to which names are meaningful and correct.

We recognize that the form, Good Government, is embodied partially in each of the particular instances of government cited above. What we experience are partial and ever-changing embodiments of Good Government only. But this very actuality of partially good government implies a changeless, enduring reality embodied in all the incomplete instances and containing the perfection of the Idea or Form.
What Socrates does in the Cratylus (and all the other dialogues) is use names in such a way that the stable natures (Forms) presupposed by the very activity of naming become manifest in their use. Instead of simply using the word "virtue" to refer to virtuous acts, Socrates encourages the participants (including us readers) to pay attention to the abiding reality (Form) that is made manifest by the very way in which the word "virtue" is used. Language presupposes in its function the existence of stable natures (Forms), and can be used by a dialectician in such a way as to make these natures (Forms) manifest.

"Sufism may be viewed in one sense as struggling against the use of words to establish patterns of thinking whereby mankind is kept at a certain stage of ineptitude; or made to serve organisms which are ultimately not of evolutionary value."

Idries Shah

When we use the words "Good Government" in speaking to intelligent people, they intuitively know what those words mean. That implies, as we've seen, that they have a primordial knowledge of the reality of Good Government. If humans didn't possess a preexistent awareness of realities--including Forms--then we could not communicate, since human communication presupposes meaning.

Socrates does not even attempt to explain the exact nature of the relation between name and thing (reality). He recognizes that how a word makes manifest the true nature of a thing, expressing a truth that transcends it, is not possible to describe in words--it can only be experienced in the mystical experience called Dialectic.

The Dialectical Use of Names to Disclose Realities

Dialecticians like Socrates know how to use words in such a way that they point beyond themselves in making manifest those unchanging natures (Forms) to which they are essentially related, i.e., they would not be meaningful words without such a relation. The relation between word and thing is not created by dialecticians, but is made manifest by them.

Socrates' very question "What is virtue?" presupposes that there is a difference between the manifestation (revelation, disclosure) of a thing's nature and a description of this nature. The question indicates that no definition can do justice to the nature of a reality such as virtue as revealed in a dialectical inquiry.

In the disclosure brought about by the use of a name in Dialectic, we have not once and for all grasped (finalized, completed) the nature of the thing named. More is disclosed than can be adequately expressed in a description or a concept. Knowledge of the true nature of a reality can't be derived from words; that is realized only in attaining higher consciousness, as in the experience of Dialectic.
A name is natural insofar as its discovery and use in Dialectic reveals (some of) the true nature of the thing signified. What the name means, what it makes manifest in Dialectic, is neither conventional nor relative. In the disclosure accomplished through the use of a name in Dialectic, we have not once and for all grasped the nature of the thing we are naming. This nature is manifest to us in its distinctness, but we then need to make explicit what is only implicit in this disclosure. It is only subsequent to the activity of naming and the disclosure of the reality in Dialectic, that description and conceptualization have a place. In most instances it will be the case that no description and no concept can entirely do justice to the nature of the reality revealed by the activities of naming it and disclosing it in Dialectic.

Socrates' enlightened investigation in Dialectic of a word such as "harmony" ensures that the nature of harmony is somehow disclosed. In a dialectical inquiry, we find that we already exist in the relation between the name and the thing; we cannot explain how this relation comes about. Without this disclosure provided by the name's use, the search for the essence of an unknown reality--such as "harmony"--could never get underway or achieve consummation. But Dialectic does not have as its goal merely a definition or a name. A name makes manifest not only the particular instantiation (entity) but points beyond itself to a Form manifest in the specific entity. A name or word, used properly, always transcends itself anagogically. 11

A genuine dialectician such as Socrates is one who knows how to use words. He uses words for the purpose of making manifest those realities which the proper function of words presupposes. In introducing such Forms as Good Government itself and Beauty itself, Socrates shows us what is involved in a word's function of disclosing a known reality. In referring to a particular aspect or instance of Good Government, Socrates makes manifest that an unchanging nature (Good Government itself) is presupposed by the naming process. If we were to use the words "Good Government" to refer to a tyrannous plutocracy such as the criminal cabal, we would be using the words incorrectly by contradicting their natural function of distinguishing the reality Good Government from the reality tyrannous plutocracy.

Dialectic focuses on the function of words to disclose--precisely in order to reveal the reality presupposed by this function. In the dialogues, Socrates' engagement in Dialectic is not concerned with using words to communicate ideas or even to point to illustrative instances. Words are used to reveal a reality beyond them. The best way to know a reality is through experiencing (encountering, communing with, participating in) that reality rather than through merely naming it.

With Socrates' enlightened use of Dialectic the dangers of everyday discourse are countered. In common verbal interchange a word such as "Democracy" can cease to serve its natural function of pointing to a reality we all know. The word "Democracy" is uttered by cabal members or fellow-travelers continually, but is no longer used to make manifest a specific nature. It is simply tossed back and forth between people who have a vague feeling that it means something positive but have no genuine grasp of the reality to which it refers.
Cabal propagandists deliberately misidentify the word "Democracy" so that it ceases to serve the function of referring to genuine Democracy.

Even a reality such as "right speech" is known by people intuitively. We know that when someone uses words in any way he pleases, he is not speaking correctly. A person must speak according to the way in which things are correctly spoken of, in the way that words refer to a specific reality that we know.

We must regain the understanding, taught by Perennialist sages throughout the ages, that there is a magic in language which contributes to human evolution. Language in some way creates the very world in which we live. Words and concepts point to realities beyond the sensory world and assist us in making contact with a higher dimension. Intangible Ideas, in Plato's conception—supersensible realities beyond human thought—are appropriated through words, as birds in our hands, and released by the act of discernment, setting the birds free. These Ideas reside in the words independent of the books or the sounds in which the words are encased.

Humans today are rapidly losing the intellectual ability to realize or be concerned that their very lives are threatened by the loss of the ability to use language to understand and communicate. As Thomas Jefferson made clear, "no people can be both ignorant and free."

**Catapulting the Propaganda**

Contemporary Bush junta propagandists do not even feel the need to disguise their deliberate lies and deceptions. In a recent speech to a captive audience (people pre-screened to ensure Republican sympathies), Bush indicated that his job was "catapulting the propaganda" about Social Security.

The Bush junta now broadcasts propaganda disguised as "news stories," withholds vital information from members of Congress, and lies with impunity at every turn. Even though many Americans have been taken in by this propaganda, we can be sure—as Plato's dialogues demonstrate—that there is still some primordial understanding of enduring realities in all persons who have not become debased to the status of sub-human.

A heartening example of this awareness is now manifesting in the increasing number of Americans who are seeing the cabal’s war on Iraq as a war crime perpetrated for oil, American corporate profits, and the restructuring of the Middle East. Their awakening to this reality means that the cabal military is now having immense difficulty in recruiting men and women as cannon fodder for their senseless wars of aggression.

The awareness of the essence of Good Government is also reawakening in Americans in increasing numbers. Ultimately, this preexistent knowledge of reality will make it clear to Americans that the demonic cabal that has seized their government is working against the best interests of U.S. citizens. In our arsenal against the current
tyranny, one of our most potent weapons is a penetrating understanding of the wisdom embodied in Plato's dialogues.

"Here is the silence of silences
Which dreams of becoming a sound, and the sound
Which will perfect itself in silence."

Conrad Aiken

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1 Taken from: “Who Was Socrates?” by Michael S. Russo, Molloy College, Department of Philosophy. Mr. Russo is not particularly any worse (or better) than most academics, but his unenlightened misunderstanding of Plato is typical of scholastic "professors." Academic "professors" are the modern equivalent of the charlatans Plato opposed, the sophists.

2 Herman L. Sinaiko, Love, Knowledge, and Discourse in Plato: Dialogue and Dialectic in Phaedrus, Republic, Parmenides

3 Arcane: known or knowable only to the initiate (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition)

4 As defined by: Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition


6 American Heritage Dictionary

7 Etymology: the history of a linguistic form (as a word) shown by tracing its development since its earliest recorded occurrence in the language where it is found, by tracing its transmission from one language to another, by analyzing it into its component parts, by identifying its cognates in other languages, or by tracing it and its cognates to a common ancestral form in an ancestral language (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition)

Socrates debunks and ridicules every facet of sophistic etymology in the Cratylus.

8 Gonzalez, Francisco J., Dialectic and Dialogue: Plato's Practice of Philosophical Inquiry
Possession: domination by something (as a negative spirit, a passion, an obsession, an addiction, or a fixed idea); a psychological state in which an individual's normal personality is replaced or controlled by another. Humans can allow other entities—personalities or ideas—to control them to varying degrees. If they allow other persons or concepts to take dominant control of their thoughts and actions, they lose the ability to think or act autonomously. As a personality or an ideology takes progressive control of them, they become possessed (an obsessive, a bigot, an ideologue) and finally end in hysteria—the manifestation of self-limiting or self-destructive tendencies.

Hysteria refers to the loss of sensory or motor function without organic pathology. The person suddenly cannot hear, see, or feel, or his arm or leg may be paralyzed, or he may be unable to speak—even though the bodily organs are completely functional.

The word "anagogy" refers to entities (such as a word or a Sanctuary) which transport a person beyond himself to a higher consciousness. From the Greek anagein; to lift up, the word denotes any element (entity or experience) through which a person's actions, thoughts and feelings are lifted up from worldly sense experience to realize an experiential participation in the spiritual realm.
Chapter Eighteen: How Plato's Philosophy Helps Us Awaken

In this chapter we'll examine how the ordinary mental state of most humans is literally a form of dreaming while asleep and how Plato’s philosophy helps us realize our sleep state and teaches us how we can awaken ourselves through dialectical interchange.

We'll discover precisely what this involves, how humans arrive at this state, and—most important—how we can escape from this delusory dream state and ascend to a higher mode of consciousness. By "ordinary consciousness," we mean the usual state of awareness, including the associated mental and emotional elements.

If we ask the average person why he believes his ordinary consciousness is veridical, he'll say that it puts him in touch with reality in a way that "works" for him. "My usual way of thinking enables me to deal with objects, persons, and events in a manner that leads to successful outcomes. Since it 'works' for me why would I even consider the silly idea that I'm living in an illusory world or a dream state? I'm free from any such absurd restriction."

The difficulty is that the ordinary person isn't able--or willing--to acknowledge when his habitual consciousness (the dream state) leads him astray; when his view of the world causes him to mistake a dictatorial police state for a democracy, a mindless tyrant for a "fearless leader," and a pre-emptive, unjustified war for a struggle against terrorism and for the spreading of democracy.

The dream state of ordinary life is, of course, different from dreaming during regular sleep. This special state of dreaming sleep is an extraordinarily difficult condition to become aware of—or acknowledge. People in this dream world take it to be reality; they don't believe they're asleep—in fact they'll argue strenuously with anyone who says they're asleep and dreaming. This unusual dream world becomes a mass delusion when enough people accept the illusory domain as real. The demonic cabal presently creating this dream world is able to define reality for the sleepwalkers.

Awakening

“Wake up! Snap out of it! Something's going on and you need to wake up! You've fallen into a trance or something, and you need to rouse yourself. You think you're awake but you're not—and as you've been sleeping, all kinds of hideous things have been happening.

“I know that you think you're awake; your eyes are open, and you’ve been performing various motor functions and skills - after all, you are reading this. But
you're still not really awake! You've been going through these actions as if you're in a trance, or under a spell or something, and you're not really awake; you're not really aware. It's very hard to explain the state you're in, but if you'd just snap out of it, you'd see what I'm talking about.

“Let me put it another way. Things aren't really as you think they are. The thoughts you think aren't really your thoughts. You think them because somebody else wants you to think them. And the same applies to your actions. You do what ever it is you do because you've been programmed to do it. You don't realize it, but you've been programmed to think, act, and feel only within certain prescribed parameters. The bottom line, straight and simple, is: you are not really who you think you are - you think you are someone other than your own True Self.

“You've been sold a complete bill of goods, right down to the very basics. What you believe, what you think is right or wrong, good or bad, what you should and shouldn't do, even who and what you think you are. But it's all a dream, an illusion, the result of the indoctrination and programming you've been subjected to. But underneath all this, the real YOU still exists.

“You came into this life with a plan and a purpose. And you have an awesome power at your command. It lays silently inside, waiting... But you need to wake up and remember. Remember who you really are. Remember what you came here to do. And remember the awesome power. It is of great consequence that you do. I do realize that this must sound pretty crazy to you. But let me assure you; it is the truth. I wish there was something I could say or do that could instantly snap you out of it, but it doesn't work that way.

“Waking up is a process. Plato described it clearly in The Commonwealth, (Book VII; The Cave) And even though that was over two thousand years ago, he wasn't the first. The Vedas, the oldest written records of mankind, are road maps left behind by awakened ones. They tell of the various techniques and methods they used to wake up from this somnambulistic, dream-like state that we human beings live in.

“Imagine that! The very first entry in the journal of mankind is a call to awaken. It tells us that we human beings are not who we think we are; it calls upon us to awaken from this sleep-like state, and remember that we are so very much more than we think we are. And it describes the power. And ever since, artists, saints, and poets, throughout all the ages, have endeavored to call our attention to this higher and truer state of existence.

Simon Hunt, Spiritual-endeavors.org

The Ordinary Dreaming State

Because our habitual state of dreaming sleep is so difficult to recognize and
acknowledge, we'll need to examine this condition in detail and in as much depth as possible. The most insightful analysis of this state was carried out by Plato in a number of his dialogues. When we study Plato's dialogues mindfully we discover they possess an advanced technology enabling a prepared person to achieve a higher state of waking consciousness. We'll concentrate on Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Commonwealth*, because they refer directly to the ordinary state of dreaming sleep, reveal the nature of this condition, and provide the means of rising above such a state of delusion.

In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates asks:

"How can you determine whether at this moment we are sleeping, and all our thoughts are a dream; or whether we are awake, and talking to one another in the waking state?"

Theaetetus: "Indeed, Socrates, I do not know how to prove the one any more than the other, for in both cases the facts precisely correspond; and there is no difficulty in supposing that during all this discussion we have been talking to one another in a dream; and when in a dream we seem to be narrating dreams, the resemblance of the two states is quite astonishing."

Socrates: "You see, then, that a doubt about the reality of sense is easily raised, since there may even be a doubt whether we are awake or in a dream. And as our time is equally divided between sleeping and waking, in either sphere of existence the soul contends that the thoughts which are present to our minds at the time are true; and during one half of our lives we affirm the truth of the one, and, during the other half, of the other; and are equally confident of both."

The feeling of certainty we have about our experience—whether awake or asleep—is the same. It's naive for us to assume that our mere feeling of confidence is enough to assure the veracity of our experience.

How We Are Put To Sleep

Many people wonder why Plato insisted in the *Commonwealth* that educational and artistic material used with young people should be strictly supervised. This wonderment arises from our naive assumption that our American public educational system is free from control by ideological dogma.

In fact, the opposite is true: American public educational institutions are entirely dominated by a system of misinformation and anti-intellectualism which has been imposed by the cabal which took control of education in the first decades of the twentieth century. The result has been just what they planned for: large masses of American citizens who are certifiably illiterate and lack any ability to think for themselves, thus allowing a criminal gang to take political and economic control of our nation.
Plato insisted that educational and artistic material be supervised because young people learn from role models and become the kinds of people they read about and see in their everyday life.

"Since our students, the future leaders of the nation, imitate from their earliest childhood we should choose appropriate models for them to emulate, namely people who are courageous, self-controlled, virtuous, and free. We shouldn't encourage them to embody or imitate what is illiberal or shameful behavior because imitation gives rise to desire for that kind of reality. Imitation, continued from an early age, turns into habits and dispositions--of body, speech and mind."

*Commonwealth III* (395 c-d)

Instead of adopting Plato's teachings, Americans have allowed a depraved junta to seize control of the four most powerful brainwashing technologies in modern history: education, television, popular music, and movies. Through the insidious use of these instruments, American young people are programmed to value greed, egomania, money, power, fame, and cleverness in unscrupulousness, and are conditioned to crave and embody violence, ignorance, and anarchy.

"The average person in the US watches about four hours of television each day. Over the course of a year, we see roughly twenty five thousand commercials, many of them produced by the world's highest-paid cognitive psychologists. And these heavily produced advertisements are not merely for products, but for a lifestyle based on a consumer mind-set. What they're doing, day in and day out, twenty-five thousand times a year, is hypnotizing us into seeing ourselves as consumers who want to be entertained rather than as citizens who want to be informed and engaged. We need to take back the airwaves as a sphere of mature conversation and dialogue about our common future."


"Experiments conducted by researcher Herbert Krugman reveal that, when a person watches television, brain activity switches from the left to the right hemisphere. The left hemisphere is the seat of logical thought. Here, information is broken down into its component parts and critically analyzed. The right brain, however, treats incoming data uncritically, processing information in wholes, leading to emotional, rather than logical, responses. The shift from left to right brain activity also causes the release of endorphins, the body's own natural opiates--thus, it is possible to become physically addicted to watching television, a hypothesis borne out by numerous studies which have shown that very few people are able to kick the television habit."

Peter Russell, "Dehypnosis - Breaking the Trance"
One of Plato's ideas we must take seriously is that we're not born with a fully formed psyche or soul, but through nurture and education develop into a specific kind of person. We begin with a capacity to develop and enhance our own psyche or soul through the kinds of experiences we encounter or orchestrate. We ingest cultural messages from our parents, teachers, and authority figures and these archetypes shape our psyches. Since our souls are constituted by the cultural messages we encounter, we must carefully supervise the kinds of concepts and exemplars we experience.

To comprehend the dream state of ordinary life we have to understand the distinct nature of the immature mind and how this mind is formed and controlled. In speaking of the undeveloped mind, Socrates says:

"The immature are incapable of judging what is the underlying meaning of an allegory (\textit{hyponoia}) and what is not and the beliefs they absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable. For these reasons, then, we should take the utmost care to insure that the stories and myths that depict virtue are the best ones for them to hear." \textit{Commonwealth II} (378d)

Plato uses the Greek word \textit{hyponoia}, which refers to the hidden meaning of a myth, the meaning and understanding coming from below, from the subconscious. "Hypo" means "under," and "noia" is thought or mind. So \textit{hyponoia} is literally "hidden, deeper, or underlying thought or meaning to which an allegory refers." This word has the same stem as that used to refer to hypnosis: a process in which a person is able to affect you in a strange way by somehow coming in \textit{under} the radar of your own critical thinking, placing your ordinary consciousness in a state of suspension.

Plato is saying that an immature person cannot recognize that a myth or allegory is something that has a hidden, deeper, or underlying meaning \textit{and effect}. The immature person is unable to recognize what that deeper meaning or effect is, what the story or myth or allegory is about, what it's doing to him. This peculiar lack of orientation and inability to distinguish meanings and detect effects is constitutive of the immature and infantile mind. In the cognizance of an undeveloped mind, myths or allegories float free of their deeper symbology and inducement, they float free even of the recognition that they have deeper significance and control.

The mature, awakened mind possesses an exceptional capability of self-awareness, the "witness" aspect that allows it to stand apart and observe, ascertaining what is going on from a higher position of attentiveness. It is this extra-dimensional capability of awareness which Plato's dialogues enable us to develop, as they teach us to reflect on all aspects of our experience, not "falling asleep" in the immediacy of our sensations and thoughts.

\textbf{Psychological and Intellectual Immaturity}

To explain what immaturity means, Plato introduces us to a specific psychic type in the opening passage of Book I of the \textit{Commonwealth}: the elderly person who's never achieved intellectual or psychological maturity. Cephalus, an older man, acknowledges that
the stories and myths he experienced in his early years now haunt him, causing him to fear the retribution for sins which the myths have caused him to believe will occur after death. Cephalus, like millions of people in the modern world, never matured emotionally and mentally: fantasies frighten him because he cannot tell the difference between myth and reality. He never understood what those early brainwashing fables did to him and didn't work to overcome their negative effect.

Socrates explains that the impressions immature psyches take into their minds and emotions have a tendency to become fixed beliefs and habits, difficult to eradicate or change. A mature psyche has the capacity to distinguish truth from mere fantasy and appearance, propaganda from truth, to recognize stories as stories--and develop out of infantile illusions. Immaturity is the state of being asleep but presuming that you're awake; it is the inability to tell that you're not awake. Maturity is the capacity to distinguish true waking from vivid dream experiences. It's this discriminating capacity that goes to sleep when you go to sleep intellectually and emotionally. It's precisely because we can't tell that we're not awake that dream-experience has such power over us.

The American Condition

"The essential problem is that Americans have been lying to themselves for so many years now that they are completely incapable of telling the difference between the rather frightening truth and their mythological view of America. The roots of the problem go back to the 1930's, but the real problems began right after the Second World War, when the American government came under the control of the group of thugs who still run the country. There has been a carefully planned program of complete domination of all sources of information through total media control, the creation of the 'think tank' system to manufacture policy, the establishment of entrepreneurial right wing religion as a method of political control, the use of political contributions to buy politicians, and, if all else fails, simple violence. It is now a country where anyone who could do good is marginalized or assassinated, and changes in government are at least as likely to occur by coup d'etat than by the operation of democracy. There is no longer even the necessity to hide the fact that the country is run entirely for the benefit of certain large pools of capital. The essential lies that Americans tell themselves, which mainly have to do with class structure and, even at this late date, race, infect every major political issue in the country - crime and the incarceration industry, health care, the 'war on drugs', education, immigration including the racist response to 9-11, the environment, poverty and the extraordinary creation of what is really a new caste system consisting of a permanent underclass (something that has happened, unnoticed, only in the last few years), and even American foreign policy. Each year since around the time of Sinclair's broadcast [Gordon Sinclair's famous broadcast from radio station CFRB in Toronto in 1973] the situation has gotten worse, but lately the rate of deterioration appears to be increasing rapidly. Things have gotten so bad that the government is now fronted by a retarded (and I use that word in a technical sense) clown, who everyone treats as if he were a real President (the worst lie to yourself is when you have to pretend that the obvious
idiot who leads you is entitled to do so). The lies are so deeply ingrained into American thought that the vast majority of the population apparently is incapable of seeing that there is anything wrong, meaning that there is no possibility of change."

Xymphora.blogspot.com

In Book V (476c) of the Commonwealth, Plato explains that the incapacity of the immature mind to distinguish truth from fancy is essentially what it means to be in a dream state. While dreaming we take the dream-image of a person to be a real person. We take something similar to be the very thing to which it appears similar. His exposition explains how we can distinguish between the true waking state and the dream state.

"What about someone who believes in beautiful things, but doesn't believe in Beauty itself and isn't able to follow anyone who could lead him to the knowledge of this Form? Don't you think his life is a dream rather than a wakened state? Isn't this dreaming: whether asleep or awake, to mistake resemblance for identity, to liken dissimilar things, to identify the expression of the Form as the Form itself, to think that a likeness is not a likeness but rather the thing itself that it is like? . . .

"But take the case of the other, who recognizes the existence of Beauty and is able to distinguish the Form from the objects which participate in the Form, neither putting the objects in the place of the Form nor the Form in the place of the objects--is he a dreamer, or is he awake?

"He is wide awake.

"And may we not say that the mind of the one who knows has knowledge, and that the mind of the other, who opines only, has opinion?

"Certainly."

So, to become mature we must learn how to:

- Distinguish resemblance from identity—for example, to distinguish between true democracy and the fake democracy that we now suffer under and hear the cabal puppets lie about bringing to Iraq

- Avid equating dissimilar things— for example, advancing in age is not equivalent to maturing

- Abstain from identifying the manifestation of the Form as the Form itself: abstain from identifying our present Constitution (a plutocratic document) with the Ideal of a Commonwealth (a government of the people for the people)

- Realize that a likeness is a likeness and not the thing itself that it is like: realize that an illiterate, demented president is not a genuine American President
Maturity or awakedness is the capacity to stand apart from the immediacy of our experience and observe sensations and thoughts as they occur, reflecting on them, evaluating them, and thoughtfully choosing what our response will be. Plato assists us in attaining this kind of intellectual, emotional, and social maturity through his dialogues—but also through his myths and fables as well.

"Fables should be taught as fables, myths as myths, and miracles as poetic fancies. To teach superstitions as truths is a most terrible thing. The child-mind accepts and believes them, and only through great pain and perhaps tragedy can he be in after-years relieved of them. In fact, men will fight for a superstition quite as quickly as for a living truth - often more so, since a superstition is so intangible you can not get at it to refute it, but truth is a point of view, and so is changeable."

Hypatia (370-415 CE), a Perennialist teacher and head of the Neo-Platonist school in Alexandria, murdered on the orders of "Christian" Bishop Cyril (who was later canonized by the Church)

**The Transformative Use of Myths**

Plato is not suggesting that developing minds not be given myths, allegories, and fables from which to learn. He himself uses myth to teach and transform his readers. As with all elements in the terrestrial world, the use that is made of myths and allegories is the key. *Hyponoia*—myths with deeper meanings deposited under the literal surface—have a noetic character: the reader or listener has to think his way across a semantic bridge, beyond which lies a realm of transcendent knowledge. Plato's myths and dialogues—which are stories—are highly advanced devices through which we are enabled to ascend to a higher consciousness.

Plato's use of Dialectic and myth is so extraordinary that we have to work assiduously to grasp their deeper meaning and effect. The transformative elements of Plato's wizardry appear within the narrative of his dialogues, so it's easy to overlook them if we're not attuned to their characteristics and effects. We can learn a great deal by exploring Plato's strange myth which he develops in Book III of the *Commonwealth* (414c).

He refers to this myth as a "useful fiction" (not a lie) and says it is similar to old Phoenician tales about humankind's origin which people were encouraged to believe. The "useful fiction" or myth is to be told to all the people, informing them that their early life was a dream, that the education and training which they received was initiation into an illusory dream world. In reality, they will be told, during all that time they were actually being formed and nurtured in the womb of the earth. When they were fully formed, the earth, their mother, caused them to ascend to a higher realm. So, the earth and their country being their mother and their teacher, they are responsible for defending her against attack, and her citizens are all to be regarded as a part of their earth family.
Plato's "useful fiction" also involves telling the people that God has framed them differently. Some have the power of command, and in the composition of these he has mingled gold, wherefore they are to receive the greatest honor. Others he has made of silver, to be auxiliaries. Others again who are to be husbandmen and craftsmen he has composed of brass and iron. And God proclaims as a first principle to all the people that their primary duty is to preserve the human species.

This myth fits into Plato's discussion of how the best kinds of humans can be produced through education and training--one of the major themes of the Commonwealth. Part of the educational process consists in observing students to see how their experiences affect them: who they know, what they read, and how they act. Do they, for example, swallow nonsense which is handed them and allow their beliefs to be formed by falsehoods?

We must first recognize that Plato is presenting a myth about a myth: a story about how a story might be told to the people. Why would Plato possibly tell such a fable to the populace? What effect would Plato be trying to produce in the people to whom this myth was told? Why is he telling the story to his dialectical fellow-participants?

Part of the people's evaluation will be to see how they react to this story. Far from wanting the people to believe such a "useful fiction," Plato is encouraging a questioning attitude in them concerning how they were raised and what effect all the cultural "received truths" (principles, axioms, laws, customs, structures) had on them. He is showing that their culture's "useful fictions" have shaped all their beliefs, habits, values, tastes, desires, self-estimation, and countless other elements. "Who am I?" Plato wants them to ask; "How was I formed by my culture?" "What response have I made to the cultural myths which shaped me?"

Plato is encouraging them to question all their cultural values. "Why are there these class distinctions?" "For what purpose did my culture shape me in this particular way?" "How can I improve and transform myself, now that I have awakened to how I was structured by my culture?"

"What is so deceptive about the state of mind of the members of a society is the 'consensual validation' of their concepts. It is naively assumed that the fact that the majority of people share certain ideas or feelings proves the validity of these ideas and feelings. Nothing is further from the truth. Consensual validation as such has no bearing whatsoever on reason or mental health. Just as there is a 'folie a deux' there is a 'folie a millions.' The fact that millions of people share the same vices does not make them virtuous, the fact that they share so many errors does not make the errors to be truths, and the fact that millions of people share the same forms of mental pathology does not make them sane."

Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom
The myth is meant to awaken people to question what has happened to them, what is currently happening to them, and what intelligent response they can make to their cultural engendering. It shows how easily public myths can, in some instances, completely structure the personality and social constraints of a culture. They are encouraged to become aware that they were earlier in an unrecognized state of sleep, were caused to ascend to a higher plane of awareness, but must now investigate and study their current state of consciousness to detect aspects of sleep or immaturity still present.

*Maturity or awakenedness is the constant, unending endeavor of discovering aspects of immaturity or sleep in yourself and rising above those to a higher awareness.* One of the essential ways of telling if you're asleep is if you're regularly discovering traits and behaviors in yourself of which you were previously unaware, negative elements that controlled you without your being cognizant of them. For example, you may discover that you previously had fooled yourself into believing that you wanted to understand what is going on in the world, and you realize you hadn't really wanted to at all--as evidenced by your mindlessly accepting the cabal's propaganda.

Plato is using this unusual myth to explain the evolution of human experience. We're born as infants with very little self-awareness, living almost entirely in our immediate sensations and desires.

"The narcissistic orientation is one in which one experiences as real only that which exists within oneself, while the phenomena in the outside world have no reality in themselves, but are experienced only from the viewpoint of their being useful or dangerous to one. The opposite pole to narcissism is objectivity; it is the faculty to see people and things as they are, objectively, and to be able to separate this objective picture from a picture which is formed by one's desires and fears."

Erich Fromm. *The Art of Loving*

As we grow older, we enter what is called "adult life" and embrace the cultural myth that we've wakened to a new form of conscious awareness. But part of what Plato's myth is telling us is that credulously swallowing this "adult life" myth involves merely "waking up" from one level of dream-life to enter another one. We are like someone in a dream who dreams that he has awakened. Thus although he considers himself awake, in reality he's still in a dream. As "adults," we're encouraged to believe that we're fully mature, that we now know what life is all about and have a total awareness of reality. The cultural myth of adulthood conditions us to believe that we've been initiated into the realm of civilized life and are heir to all the "received truths" which make us "enlightened" and "awakened."

Plato's "useful fiction" helps us realize that most cultural myths are for the purpose of "putting us to sleep," making us believe we're mature and awake when we're not, making us assume we understand reality fully when we don't. Plato's myth helps us make the comprehensive distinction between appearance and reality, myth and truth, cultural conditioning and true maturity. It makes us aware that most of life is mere appearance, a dream meant to keep us asleep and ignorant. Thus this "useful fiction" is psychologically
and metaphysically revolutionary. It sows seeds of critical awareness and healthy skepticism at a "mythic level," making us wary of both the myths we've experienced and any future myths we might encounter. We seek to understand what it is to be truly awake and fully in touch with reality. And as we attain awakedness and genuine maturity, we enter an entirely new world.

"The breakdown of the infantile adjustment in which providential powers ministered to every wish compels us either to flee from reality or to understand it. And by understanding it we create new objects of desire. For when we know a good deal about a thing, know how it originated, how it is likely to behave, what it is made of, and what is its place amidst other things, we are dealing with something quite different from the simple object naively apprehended.

"The understanding creates a new environment. The more subtle and discriminating, the more informed and sympathetic the understanding is, the more complex and yet believable through the understanding."   

Walter Lippmann. *A Preface to Morals*

As Plato's myths make clear, we are the victims of a cultural trance. Whereas in hypnotism, we're aware that someone is trying to influence us, with our cultural conditioning the situation is the opposite.

- "Our consensus trance is not voluntary; it begins at birth without our conscious agreement.
- "All authority is surrendered to the parents, family members and other caretakers, who initially are regarded as omniscient and omnipotent.
- "Induction is not limited to short sessions; it involves years of repeated reinforcement.
- "Clinical therapists would consider it highly unethical to use force, but our cultural hypnotists often do -- a slap on the wrist, or severe reprimand for misbehaving. Or perhaps more subtle, but equally powerful, emotional pressures -- 'I will only love you if you think and behave as I tell you.'
- "Finally, and most significantly, the conditioning is intended to be permanent. It may come from the very best of intentions, but it is, nevertheless, meant to have a lasting effect on our personalities and the way we evaluate the world.
- "This is why awakening from our cultural trance entails far more than a simple snapping of the fingers. There is a lifetime's worth of extremely powerful induction to be overcome.
- "We would seem to be firmly stuck with our conditioning. Indeed, for most of the time we are. Yet there are occasions when we do wake up, and see things in a different light. In those moments we are given a glimpse of what is possible."

Peter Russell, "Dehypnosis - Breaking the Trance"
Awakening From Relativism

Developing this higher level of awareness and discernment requires not only a positive expansion of our understanding and capabilities but ridding ourselves of negative elements. For example, we can only gain increased powers of discernment if we're unreservedly honest about ourselves and constantly seek to discover personality features that hold us back. We learn to recognize when we're rationalizing, equivocating, lying, projecting, or acting defensively.

Plato explains—and effects—escape from sleep in Socrates' discussion with Theaetetus and Theodorus in the dialogue Theaetetus. Cultural "sleep" in Plato's day as in ours is created by people becoming literally possessed by the Protagorean/Thrasymachan ideology:

• There is no objective truth; each individual is the determiner of truth and value for himself.
• Whatever a society thinks useful, and establishes as the truth, really is the truth so long as the established order continues in power
• Justice is the interest of those in power: they decree what is legal or just

Relativism is the view that the truth, meaning, and value of human ideals, principles, beliefs, and behaviors have no absolute reference. Relativists claim that humans understand and evaluate ideals, principles, beliefs, and behaviors only in terms of their personal, historical, or cultural conditioning.

Plato's discussion of relativism is of immediate relevance because it has currently become the reigning ideology of American society. According to this creed, there is no way to determine the truth; truth is merely what a person happens to believe or what is imposed on society by the dominant powers; justice is the interest of those in power. Truth, under the rule of the current demonic cabal, is whatever they say is true. If they say there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and we must invade Iraq to make us safe from terrorists, then by golly, that's the truth. If that proves not to be borne out by inspection, so what. The truth is what they say is the truth. Dubya's allowing the NSA to spy on Americans is legal—because he says it's legal.

We can best get a sense of the fantasy-based non-thinking of the Bush cult from an article by Ron Suskind in the New York Times:

"In the summer of 2002, after I had written an article in Esquire that the White House didn't like about Bush's former communications director, Karen Hughes, I had a meeting with a senior adviser to Bush. He expressed the White House's displeasure, and then he told me something that at the time I didn't fully comprehend -- but which I now believe gets to the very heart of the Bush presidency.

"The aide said that guys like me were 'in what we call the reality-based community,'
which he defined as people who 'believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.' I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. 'That's not the way the world really works anymore,' he continued. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality -- judiciously, as you will -- we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.'"

Plato's refutation of relativism now has a very modern application, because Protagorean relativism has seized the minds of many Americans:

- Since whatever a man thinks at the time is the truth for him, then no person can assess another person's judgment and see if it is right or wrong, so intelligent investigation of the truth becomes nonsense

- Every person is equal in wisdom to every other person: that's why we have so many uninformed idiots paraded in front of television cameras as though their complete ignorance is an indication of their grasp of the truth

- All that arguments can be is forceful or entertaining, never true--(what pretends to be "argument" on TV is most often downright boring and the expression of uninformed beliefs)

Plato anticipated another contemporary falsehood: truth as determined by public opinion poll.

"Socrates: 'And how about Protagoras himself? If neither he nor the multitude thought, as indeed they do not think, that man is the measure of all things, must it not follow that the truth of which Protagoras wrote would be true to no one? But if you suppose that he himself thought this, and that the multitude does not agree with him, you must begin by allowing that in whatever proportion the many are more than one, in that proportion his truth is more untrue than true.'

"Theodorus: 'That would follow if the truth is supposed to vary with individual opinion.'

"Socrates: 'And the best of the joke is, that he acknowledges the truth of their opinion who believe his own opinion to be false; for he admits that the opinions of all men are true.'

"Theodorus: 'Certainly.'

"Socrates: 'And does he not allow that his own opinion is false, if he admits that the opinion of those who think him false is true?'

"Theodorus: 'Of course.'" (170e-171a)
Socrates points out the absurdity of saying that truth is determined by personal feeling. If this were true, he says, then truth would be determined by public opinion polls. An idea believed in by only a few—as in the case of Protagoras' view of "man is the measure of all things" would be false in reference to polling percentages.

Socrates makes it clear that truth is not determined by personal feeling, popular appeal or majority vote: it is an independent reality which must be discovered through objective investigation.

"An opinion on a point of conduct, not supported by reasons, can only count as one person's preference; and if the reasons, when given, are a mere appeal to a similar preference felt by other people, it is still only many people's liking instead of one. To an ordinary man, however, his own preference, thus supported, is not only a perfectly satisfactory reason, but the only one he generally has for any of his notions of morality, taste, or propriety, which are not expressly written in his religious creed."

John Stuart Mill. *On Liberty*

The cultural sleep state many Americans have allowed themselves to fall into involves the belief that truth is whatever their "leaders" tell them and right behavior is however their "leaders" act. It's okay for "leaders" to "out" a CIA agent if they don't happen to like what her husband says about their lying about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. It's legal to allow elections to be fixed in Florida and Ohio and elsewhere because Bush and his supporters say that the evidence for fraud is irrelevant.

The absolutely fatal danger of this kind of non-thinking inculcated by a culturally-induced dream state is beyond measure. The very life and death of Americans is now being determined by such a cultural sleep state:

- Unthinking people are signing up for Bush's unlawful wars and dying by the thousands
- American workers in the millions are losing their jobs and falling into poverty and homelessness
- Constitutional freedoms are being destroyed wholesale before our eyes.

If you think all this talk about Americans being asleep is philosophical nonsense, the stark reality of this dream state is made dramatically evident when we see almost no Americans rising up to protect their lives and their country. In this current totalitarian mind-set, the cultural myth that truth is a personal whim allows unscrupulous leaders to dictate "truths" which will inevitably lead to our destruction.
"How is it possible that the strongest of all instincts, that for survival, seems to have ceased to motivate us? One of the most obvious explanations is that the leaders undertake many actions that make it possible for them to pretend they are doing something effective to avoid a catastrophe: endless conferences, resolutions, disarmament talks, all give the impression that the problems are recognized and something is being done to resolve them. Yet nothing of real importance happens; but both the leaders and the led anesthetize their consciences and their wish for survival by giving the appearance of knowing the road and marching in the right direction.

"While in our private life nobody except a mad person would remain passive in view of a threat to our total existence, those who are in charge of public affairs do practically nothing, and those who have entrusted their fate to them let them continue to do nothing."

Erich Fromm, To Have or To Be?

Plato To the Rescue

What Plato's dialogues provide us—especially in such critical times as these we're living in—is a clear vision of what life is all about and a reassuring sense of the ultimate victory of transcendent, timeless truths. In the Theaetetus, Socrates finds two persons—Theodorus and Theaetetus—who have allowed themselves to be almost completely possessed by Protagorean relativism. This is similar to the situation in which we now find ourselves, when we encounter millions of Americans who have allowed themselves to be culturally brainwashed into a mindless relativism: whatever leaders say is the truth is the truth.

But even in persons who have allowed themselves to be enslaved by destructive ideologies (think "compassionate conservatism") there are still deep, foundational soul-elements through which to assist them to regain a truth-affirming self-empowerment.

- Humans recognize both wisdom and ignorance as characteristics of different people and seek the wise as their teachers.
- Humans are aware that there are great differences in the ability of specific persons to understand what is reality or truth.
- In relation to health and science, persons acknowledge that not all people possess knowledge of what is best—only some possess that knowledge; some people are superior to others in terms of knowledge.
- Humans recognize that a person who cannot give a reason for a thing, has no knowledge of that thing, that only when someone can provide a rational explanation does he possess genuine knowledge.
- Humans recognize that knowledge is correct judgment accompanied by knowledge of the difference between one object and other objects.
"We compel [the members of the jury] to hear both sides before casting their vote. We compel them to hear those two sides according to some rational rule of evidence and advocacy; and then, having taken these precautions, we take the further precaution of having the evidence summarized by an expert in the shape of the judge, who shows its relation to the law. Only then have we some hope that their decision may be broadly a sound one."

Norman Angell, *The Public Mind*

From their own knowledge of mathematics, Theodorus and Theaetetus understand that there are experts in the area of ethics or morality as in all other fields. They’re aware that truths—such as mathematical truths—are not determined by subjective whim and that a person can’t merely make something true by saying it is. From their understanding of mathematics, they recognize that they are not knowledgeable in certain other areas, for example, in the field of determining what is true justice. They recognize that there are experts, such as Socrates, in the area of virtue, justice, and wisdom.

From their insight into geometry and other mathematical sciences, Theodorus and Theaetetus understand that one must have the humility of "knowing that one does not know" which makes a person ready to learn. They recognize that such psychological capacities constitute a kind of moral prerequisite in one's character, different from competence or expertise in a particular subject matter such as geometry. They agree with Socrates that morality is as stable and real a dimension of human knowledge as mathematics.

Socrates finds it possible, with such intelligent persons as Theodorus and Theaetetus, to clear up the smoke and mirrors of cultural relativism—the mind-state of being asleep instead of aware. From their knowledge of mathematics they know that there are principles that exist outside the terrestrial realm—Forms which are expressed only imperfectly through mundane entities such as the image of a triangle drawn on a sheet of paper. They realize that when they see geometric images with their eyes, they are also-- more importantly--seeing noetic Forms with their higher intellect. They know that geometric truths are not private understandings (whims or declarations) subject to public controversy, but universal conceptions valid for all. By extension, they are able to comprehend that there are similar universal and unchanging structures—such as justice—in the field of morality.

What Socrates is able to effect, through Dialectic, is the ascent of Theodorus and Theaetetus from the subterranean cave of myth-thinking and relativism to an awareness of their Higher Self which recognizes excellence in humans and the transcendental existence of Forms which are manifested in mundane entities.
Socrates is in part a "physician of the soul." A soul made unhealthy (unjust, ignorant, presumptuous) by cultural myths does not see clearly--is asleep in a dream world. So the imposed dis-ease of somnambulism--cultural sleep--must be cured because "seeing" transcendent realities requires turning one's whole soul toward the good, the Higher Forms. Only the healthy, psychically awake person is able to discern supersensible realities such as Beauty, Justice, Goodness, and Wisdom. Only an awakened person can see through the muck of everyday affairs to the divinely guided evolution of humankind.

"Real ability is to respect relative truth without damaging oneself by refusing to realize that it will be superseded. When you observe that today's controversies often reveal not relevance but the clash of the untaught with the wrongly taught, and when you can endure this knowledge without cynicism, as a lover of humankind, greater compensations will be open to you than a sense of your own importance or satisfaction in thinking about the unreliability of others."

Idries Shah, A Perfumed Scorpion

Plato is telling us that although we've awakened to a certain level of conscious experience, we must now develop the capacity to recognize life as a higher form of allegory. Waking up to conscious adult social life has involved merely entering a dream at another level where we're unable to distinguish between physical objects and the Forms which they manifest.

We must now move on to the next level where we acquire the ability to recognize terrestrial objects, events, and persons as higher allegories (hyponoia) pointing to deeper, hidden meanings. Earthly entities--such as beautiful people--are in fact manifestations of the Form Beauty.

Only if we make a concerted effort to examine our lives for elements which impede our development and keep us asleep, can we attain a higher state of awareness and awakedness to who we really are and the ability to understand life in higher terms:

- The physical world is itself a divulgence of the higher world of Forms.
- The Divine has the power to take all human actions and use them to assist us in our evolution.
- Who we are--at the highest level--is conduits of spiritual purposes which transcend any single person, group of persons, or any specific time period.
- The Divine manifests through everyone and everything.
- Each person receives exactly the experiences from which they can best learn what they need for their personal evolution--and at the same time for the evolution of all humankind.
• The Divine creates a world which provides precisely coordinated learning experiences transcendentally matched to our current needs and capabilities.

One of Plato’s most powerful means of assisting us to awaken is his Allegory of the Cave. We’ll first explore the Allegory in Plato’s original phrasing, then examine its deeper meanings for us.

**The Allegory of the Cave**

Behold! human beings living in an underground cave, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the cave; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

- I see.
- And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.
- You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.
- Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?
- True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?
- Yes, he said.
- And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?
- Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?

- No question, he replied.

To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

- That is certain.

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive some one saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision, -what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them, will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?

- Far truer.

And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take and take in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

- That is true.

And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he's forced into the presence of the sun himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.

- Not all in a moment, he said.

He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day?

- Certainly.
Last of all, will he be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water, but he will see him in his own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate him as he is.

- Certainly.

He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and in a certain way the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Clearly, he said, he would first see the sun and then reason about him.

And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the cave and his fellow-prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

- Certainly, he would.

And if they were in the habit of conferring honors among themselves on those who were quickest to observe the passing shadows and to remark which of them went before, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honors and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer, Better to be the poor servant of a poor master, and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner?

- Yes, he said, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner . . .

And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the cave, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous?

Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.

**Explication of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave**

As Plato himself explains, this allegory is meant to depict our actual terrestrial existence. The persons depicted are called "prisoners" because they're constrained by cultural chains that prohibit their seeing true reality or being in genuine communication with their fellow "prisoners." They can't expand their vision of "reality" because their lifelong cultural chains prevent them from looking beyond set limits. The "prisoners" identify the shadows cast on the wall in front of them as reality.
Actually, their "reality" is being contrived by "manipulators of reality," propagandists, mind-control experts who show them "shadows" (unreal images and sounds), thereby making them believe that the shadows are reality. Because they're unaware of their manipulators, the "prisoners" allow any of these mind-twisters to control them.

The "prisoners" are powerless to communicate in a genuine way with the other "prisoners," but if they did they would merely confirm each others' belief that the "shadows" are reality.

If one of the "prisoners" is "disabused" of his delusions, he would at first find this a very "painful" experience.

If the "prisoner" was shown a higher, "brighter" aspect of reality, he would still think that the "shadows" were more real than actual reality.

The "prisoner" would not move toward the "light" of truth on his own volition, because he would have been conditioned to believe that "reality" is something others must reveal to him, not himself.

Being shown true reality would feel painful and irritating to him. The "light" of truth would dazzle him and he would feel bereft that none of his old realities are any longer available.

As more of true reality is revealed to him, things similar to the "shadows" of his old reality will first be most apparent. Less "radiant" aspects of genuine reality will be most easily discerned by him.

Only gradually will the true light of reality—the "sun"—become visible to him. He will see that the "sun" is the cause of all discernment, inside and outside the cave.

When he realizes the truth about reality, he will feel pity for those still in the cave of ignorance and delusion.

He would see through the false values, honors, glories, and prestige of the world of the cave. He would recognize that he is unquestionably better off with true knowledge and values than the illusions of wealth and fame in the cave world of delusion.

The man freed of cave illusions would rather be a poor servant of a poor master in the world of Truth than a high potentate in the world of ignorance and deception.

If the freed man returned to the cave, he would no longer be able to compete with the "shadow people" in comprehending their shadow images. They would say of him that his ascent to what he calls Truth has ruined his discernment; that the fantasy of trying to ascend to what is called Truth is dangerous, to be avoided at all cost.

If a freed person tried to help a "shadow person," the other "shadow people" would try to capture and murder him.

This allegorical explanation of human life makes it clear why most people live in a world of illusion—and find it more comfortable to remain in that fantasy realm. They
find it painful or unpleasant to be disabused of their delusions and find forthright exposition of Truth too much for them. "Shadow people" are incapable of communicating with others because they only know how to speak the language of pretense, not Truth.

Overcoming our personal and cultural conditioning will require that we ascend out of our "cave world" and rediscover authentic ideas, values, and actions, restoring real elements to their rightful place in our culture. Sages within the Perennial Tradition such as Hermes, the Hebrew Wisdom savants, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Jesus, have all taught that the true purpose of human life is to progressively identify with our Higher Self, realizing and manifesting our oneness with the Divine.

"The dreamer is not awake, he who is awake dreams not; for these things are the opposites of each other.
"He who thus understands, discerning the real from the unreal, ascertaining reality by his own awakened vision, knowing his own Self as partless awakening, freed from these things reaches peace in the Higher Self."

Shankara, The Crest-Jewel of Wisdom
Chapter Nineteen: Plato and the Saving Remnant

In each era, small groups of advanced thinkers have pushed humankind forward, revealing what persons are capable of, while battling the forces of degradation, ignorance, and indifference. But the ongoing struggle against oppression is ultimately insufficient—as one form of tyranny replaces another in historic succession. Humans must at last attain the understanding and capability that will enable them to create a higher social order.

"The genuine practitioners of the love of and the search for wisdom will be but a small remnant. . . Those who belong to this small class have tasted how sweet and blessed a possession philosophy is."

Plato, *The Commonwealth*, VI

In chapter fifteen we examined how the realization of a commonwealth must come about. In this chapter we're concentrating on the role of a saving remnant in assisting in this process of creating a benevolent social order.

In a time when a demonic international cabal tyrannizes the ordinary world, we wonder how humankind will ever gain the understanding and the power to throw off this reign of terror and establish a commonwealth for the good of all its members. Those alive now have never experienced a civil order whose principles and structures accrue to the well-being and full development of all its citizens. This is essentially an unfamiliar concept and experience. How, then, can humans gain the understanding and power to create a benevolent society while living in a culture where egotistic greed and uncontrolled power are the standards?

From time immemorial, humans have been dominated by small despotic groups characterized by ruthlessness and depravity, with a benevolent leader here and there thrown in for good measure. A somewhat progressive industrial capitalism that came into dominance in the eighteenth century has devolved into a baleful vulture capitalism and a positive but flawed American democracy has now degenerated into a barbaric totalitarianism.

As people have been mentally conditioned in autocratic social control and interaction, "the struggle of all against all," the knowledge and capability relative to effective group solidarity and decision-making have essentially been lost.
As Paulo Freire\(^1\) has made clear, oppressed people see themselves as competitive animals in a "dog eat dog" society, identifying with their capitalist oppressors and vulture capitalism's despotic ideology.

Oppressed people can lose consciousness of themselves as real persons with authentic power or as members of an oppressed class. If tyrannized people do not learn to think for themselves, they remain mere pawns of the ideology of the ruling class.

"The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."\(^2\)

The Concept and Realization of the Saving Remnant

The concept of the "saving remnant" is constituted by allegory,\(^3\) metaphor,\(^4\) and analogy,\(^5\) deriving its meaning from a number of sources. In this chapter's use of the concept, "saving" does not refer to orthodox religious "salvation"\(^6\) whereby a believer has faith in and devotion to a "savior" who "saves" him from an angry deity who wishes to punish him for his sins.

In our use of the term, "saving"\(^7\) refers to protecting, maintaining, preserving, or rediscovering something of value. The concept of remnant in this chapter refers to a small surviving, transformative, and enlightening group, in somewhat the same terms used by Gerald Sykes in his book *The Saving Remnant*.

"A Remnant means, both originally and in the sense in which it is used here, a group of people who have survived or can survive a great catastrophe, while an elite means a group of socially superior persons. The origin of one word is religious, of the other social. In its flowering a society may produce an elite. It is only in a time of extreme trial that it is called upon to produce a Remnant. . . ."

*A saving remnant, then, is a small group which discovers, applies, and disseminates transmutational\(^8\) principles within its own domain, proving the truth and efficacy of its precepts by its own practices, then leavening the larger culture within which it exists, creating a commonwealth.*

The Necessity of a Saving Remnant

As the world descends into anarchy, it is only such an advanced fellowship that has the higher knowledge of how to transform human character while at the same time preserving the essentials of human civilization. A transformative group provides the most effective organizational and strategic means for struggling against personal and social ignorance and tyranny.
This coalition of advanced thinkers provides an effective laboratory for experimentation and training in consensus decision-making which will produce innovative concepts, procedures, and leaders to assist in building an advanced human culture. This initiate echelon provides a sustaining environment of open, positive interpersonal interchange in which individuals can develop to their fullest.

A transformative fellowship provides security in numbers and commitment and provides the pattern for a new society for future generations. This grouping of initiates provides a supportive experimental environment in which new ideas, art forms, and approaches can be tried, tested, proved, nurtured, and disseminated.

A transformative group--an ageless spiritual aristocracy which disseminates wisdom to humankind in each historic era--conducts itself according to Perennialist precepts. Thus, it contains in its very existence and modes of operation the mystery of how transformation is carried out through group activities and how human groups can function at the highest level.

The Felt Need for Preservation

The progress of civilization has largely been the work of creative and conscientious men and women, forgotten by history and derided by power brokers and scholastics. The criminal cabal has been able to destroy the minds of a great number of Americans, to the point that they are blind to the debauched, lethal condition of the nation and the world. They're aware of almost nothing of what's happening in the world, what's happening to the psyches of the world's peoples, and therefore see no need for preservation.

Since the brain-dead masses throughout the world see no need for deliverance from the totalitarian cabal, they make exceptional people--those who could rescue them from the death-throes of their suicidal ignorance--seem superfluous.

"What further evidence do we need of the degrading ends of our acquisitive existence, when it has reduced our defenses and self-justifications to a level which, by any normal standard of judgment, has lost all the essential marks of civilization? What shall we say of ourselves, and of our philosophy and 'way of life,' when, looking for the spokesmen of the best in the traditions of Western culture, we find that we have made them into superfluous men? How many of those who are acknowledged to be individuals of cultivation and sensibility are able to make their voices heard? How many try to make themselves heard? You hear a Bertrand Russell in England, a Lewis Mumford in the United States. A Schweitzer speaks from Africa. There are one or two more, perhaps, who would qualify as of this group, but the Saving Remnant among contemporaries is indeed a desperately tiny few. Camus is dead. James Agee is dead.

"Here, you might say, in Gerald Sykes' phrase, is 'the politics of shipwreck,'"
which is the only kind of politics worth practicing, these days. [Sykes'] conception of the Remnant reminds us somewhat of the endeavor of Pythagoras in founding his school at Krotona. The Greek philosopher sought to train individuals in a way of life that would enable them to go out into society and lift it to a higher level by the leverage of their personal example." 9

The saving remnant assists the larger culture to recognize its critical need for knowledge and awareness by which it can be delivered from the murderous intentions of the current cabal which is running rampant over the face of the earth.

"The mass society must first recover from its moral insensibility, and this can happen only as more and more of its members stop submitting to mass compulsions. The Remnant, in short, must grow." 10

"In an essay on this subject, 11 Albert Jay Nock identified the few who understand this problem as members of what he, following the Book of Isaiah, called the Saving Remnant, in which he placed Plato and Marcus Aurelius along with the Hebrew prophet. To structure his analysis, Nock rendered Isaiah into modern English. (The time of Isaiah was after the rule of King Uzziah of Israel, who reigned for fifty-two years (808-756 B.C.), a period of notable prosperity.) Nock relates:

'In the year of Uzziah's death, the Lord commissioned the prophet to go out and warn the people of the wrath to come. "Tell them what a worthless lot they are," He said. "Tell them what is wrong, and why, and what is going to happen unless they have a change of heart and straighten up. Don't mince matters. Make it clear that they are positively down to their last chance. Give it to them good and strong, and keep on giving it to them. I suppose perhaps I ought to tell you," He added, "that it won't do any good. The official class and their intelligentsia will turn up their noses at you, and the masses will not even listen. They will all keep on in their own ways until they carry everything down to destruction, and you will probably be lucky if you get out with your life.

'Isaiah had been very willing to take on the job; in fact, he had asked for it; but this prospect put a new face on the situation. It raised the obvious question why, if all that were so, if the enterprise were to be a failure from the start, was there any sense in starting it? "Ah," the Lord said, "you do not get the point. There is a Remnant there that you know nothing about. They are obscure, unorganized, inarticulate, each one rubbing along as best he can. They need to be encouraged and braced up, because when everything has gone completely to the dogs, they are the ones who will come back and build up a new society, and meanwhile your preaching will reassure them and keep them hanging on. Your job is to take care of the Remnant, so be off now and set about it." 12
Humans must overcome their tendency to ignore and marginalize persons with wisdom, gaining essential respect for those adepts capable of preserving civilization and developing a higher social order. The desire for a commonwealth must come out of the understanding that other seemingly simpler and more efficient principles of social order lead inevitably to the oppression of society by a tyrannous faction. We gain this understanding by experiencing oppressive forms of despotism in the family, the workplace, and the community. By experiencing the oppression and life-destruction which these forms entail we gain an intense desire for the commonwealth way of life.

Unlike Isaiah's concept of the saving remnant as the "obscure, unorganized, inarticulate" residue that happens to survive catastrophe, our concept of a transformative, enlightening group in this chapter refers to a deliberately created, carefully developed grouping with advanced knowledge and capability.

**A Deliberately Created Saving Remnant**

Every civilization has contained within it the principle that certain advanced persons have constituted the means by which a society has been preserved and advanced: Sargon of Babylonia, Hermes (Thoth) of Egypt, Moses of the Hebrew nations, Pericles of Greece, and the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius—to name only a few. At some point in the nation's history the people have been "taken captive" by some hostile, malevolent force, necessitating the extraordinary efforts of a Patriarchal Leader to preserve a remnant by which to rebuild the society. Much of this epochal history is mere myth, with little if any foundation in reality and is always based on the happenstance of a Preserver appearing on the scene.

But in truth, as we've explored in previous chapters, throughout history humankind has been preserved and its mind and spirit advanced through the arcane wisdom of Perennialist teachers. They have initiated the great impulses that move humanity forward, leaving their mark, as in the examples of Perennialist-inspired leaders like Frederick II and teachers such as Diotima, Hypatia, Boethius, Rumi, and Bernard of Clairvaux. "Great persons" have been a force for good throughout human history, as Thomas Carlyle, H. L. Menckhen and others have made clear.

"Universal history, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the history of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrive to do or attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realisation and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these."

*Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*"
“The torch of civilization is carried . . . by a small minority of restless and enterprising men. The members of this minority work in countless ways, and there is an immense variation in the nature and value of their several activities. . . What they always aim at, whether by design or only instinctively, is the improvement of human life on this earth. . . Out of this class come not only all the men who enrich civilization, but also all those who safeguard it. They are the guardians of what it has gained in the past as well as the begetters of all it gains today and will gain hereafter. Left to the great herd it would deteriorate inevitably, as it has deteriorated in the past whenever the supply of impatient and original men has fallen off. This is the true secret of the rise and fall of cultures. They rise so long as they produce a sufficiency of superior individuals, and they begin to fall the moment the average man approximates their best."

H. L. Mencken, Minority Report

But never has an individual leader or a group been able--yet--to develop a lasting civil order based on the principle of serving the interests of all its citizens. In the history of the United States, Thomas Jefferson and Franklin D. Roosevelt saved the country from collapsing into totalitarianism (Federalist party tyranny) and economic disaster (the Great Depression of 1929). But America was soon again overpowered by domestic and European moneyed interests in the nineteenth century, represented by the Belmots and the Rothschilds, and the result was the American Civil War and the severe depression of 1893. Since the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the international cabal, typified by the Rockefellers, the British royals, and Harriman interests--including their puppets from both American political parties--have controlled the American economic and political systems to the detriment of the people, while amassing great wealth and power for themselves. Even worse, the demonic cabal now has seized power through the coup d'etats of JFK's assassination and the 2000 and 2004 rigged elections, and threatens to retain unending power through violence and corruption.

We are historically at a time, therefore, when we can no longer merely hope and wait for a "Great Leader" to come along, someone who might pull us out of our present cataclysmic condition. If humankind is to be preserved from utter destruction by this demonic cabal, we must deliberately create a saving remnant that will rescue us from our plight, an advanced group which will demonstrate higher knowledge, disseminating this wisdom through which to build a society in which the good of all its members is the operating principle.

Getting the Concepts and the Facts Straight

Before exploring how a saving remnant creates the internal structure of a commonwealth and then leavens the larger society with this same ordering principle, we must be sure we understand certain concepts and facts:
A society has either of two basic forms of government, as Plato made clear in his *Commonwealth*:

1. Oligarchy: a government in which a small elite group rules for its own benefit
   - Plutocracy: rule of those with wealth
   - Tyranny: rule of a criminal cabal, a totalitarian dictatorship
2. Commonwealth: a government in which political and economic principles and practices accrue to the benefit of all members of society

This form of government must be ruled by an aristocracy with special knowledge and skill. Only a commonwealth ruled by persons who are seekers of wisdom—philosophers—is able to avoid oligarchy.

A commonwealth is not a democracy.

Conceptually, a representative democracy is defined as the rule of the people through elected representatives, whereas a commonwealth refers to a social ordering principle whereby a group or nation operates in a way to benefit all the people, not just a ruling clique. Instead of working to improve the flawed principles of democracy—of whatever kind—we must begin working toward a commonwealth: a society founded on law and united by compact of the people for the common good.

The U.S. is not now and never has been a democracy, not even a representative democracy.

"[The Framers of the Constitution] had no wish to usher in democracy in the United States. They were not making war upon the principle of aristocracy and they had no more intention than had the Tories of destroying the tradition of upper-class leadership in the colonies. Although they hoped to turn the Tories out of office, they did not propose to open these lush pastures to the common herd. They did believe, however, that the common people, if properly bridled and reined, might be made allies in the work of freeing the colonies from British rule and that they—the gentry—might reap the benefits without interference. They expected, in other words, to achieve a 'safe and sane' revolution of gentlemen, by gentlemen, and for gentlemen."


As Howard Zinn has shown in *A People's History of the United States*,

"The American system is the most ingenious system of control in world history. With a country so rich in natural resources, talent, and labor power the system can afford to distribute just enough to just enough people to limit discontent to a troublesome minority. It is a country so powerful, so big, so pleasing to so many of its citizens that it can afford to give freedom of dissent to the small number who are not pleased. How wise to turn the fear and anger of the majority toward a class
of criminals bred - by economic inequity - faster than they can be put away, deflecting attention from the huge thefts of national resources carried out within the law by men in executive offices."

"Democracy is a pathetic belief in the collective wisdom of individual ignorance."

Henry Louis Mencken

Democracy throughout history has largely constituted a scam which a ruling faction has used to fool the people. One of the reasons why ignorant, ill-intentioned, and cabal-financed frauds such as Karl Popper and Leo Strauss have attacked Plato is because he was forthright enough to reveal the reality of democracy--that it is in actuality the manipulation of the masses by an elite who fools the common people into thinking they're ruling when they aren't.

"These will be some of the features of democracy... it will be, in all likelihood, an agreeable, lawless, parti-colored society, dealing with all alike on a footing of equality, whether they be really equal or not."

Plato, *The Commonwealth*

Plato had seen this form of swindle practiced on the citizens of Athens, and had witnessed the deadly results of such a fraud when a pseudo-democratic group sentenced his teacher and friend Socrates to death on trumped-up charges.

Plato provides the best solution regarding the tensions between various factions in a society and how best to order a nation to benefit all citizens. A nation, Plato recognized, can no more be governed by "the people" than a ship at sea can be controlled by the crew or passengers. Leadership--of a ship or a nation-state--requires special expertise that can only be gained by knowledge and experience.

"Our aim in founding the State was not the disproportionate happiness of any one class, but the greatest happiness of the whole; we thought that in a State which is ordered with a view to the good of the whole we should be most likely to find Justice."

Plato, *Commonwealth III*

A society is always ruled by an elite, of whatever kind. If we examine history with a discerning eye, we discover that power and initiative have always been exercised by a cohesive minority (elite) who are marked off from the mass of the population by some particular skill, quality, or insight.
Human beings do not organize themselves spontaneously; things only happen when a small group decides to act in moving the larger collection forward. Whether it be a book club or a nation, someone has to decide what the group will do, who will be members and who won't, when and where it will meet, and all the other minutiae that most members of a collective never suspect have to be done. Most human beings have neither the time, the interest, nor the opportunity to act unless led by a small elite.

"In all societies—from societies that are very meagerly developed and have barely attained the dawnings of civilization, down to the most advanced and powerful societies—two classes of people appear—a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second class, the more numerous, is directed and controlled by the first, in a manner that is more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent."

Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, 1896

The term "elite" is a neutral term, referring to any small leadership group, whether its goals are positive or negative relative to the larger collective it controls.

"Human society is not homogeneous, it is made up of elements which differ more or less, not only according to the very obvious characteristics such as sex, age, physical strength, health, etc., but also according to less observable, but no less important, characteristics such as intellectual qualities, morals, diligence, courage, etc. . . Just as one distinguishes the rich and poor in society even though income increases gradually from the lowest to the highest, one can distinguish the elite in a society, the part which is aristocratic, in the etymological sense, and a common part. . . The notion of this elite is dependent on the qualities which one seeks in it. There can be an aristocracy of saints, an aristocracy of brigands, an aristocracy of scholars, an aristocracy of thieves, etc."


A commonwealth must be lead by a philosophical aristocracy. Those best able to direct the course of a society, Plato maintained, are those who are trained in the search for wisdom (philosophy) and live their lives as protectors of the people. But instead of recognizing this insight as the guide for a nation-state, throughout history small groups of ignorant, self-deluded, power-mad pretenders have seized political-economic-social control, ignoring those who truly know how to order a society.

Plato recognized that a nation would have to be composed of extraordinarily intelligent people to put philosopher-leaders in charge of their public institutions. Nonetheless, Plato contended that only if persons seeking true wisdom (philosophers) were the guardians of society would all people prosper, because philosophers seek the good of all the people in a society instead of a wealthy few.
Every step in human progress—social and spiritual—has been brought about by a handful of innovators who have discovered new and more productive ways of carrying out necessary tasks. The new methods and concepts both revise and replace the older, traditional techniques and ideas. Innovators, from Socrates to Jesus to Einstein, have been perceived by traditionalists as anti-social revolutionaries.

There are specific factors required for the commonwealth way of life. First, we must realize that a commonwealth is not an external condition or system but a way of life. As such, it must be pursued, achieved, and then continually maintained. By definition, it requires of its participants certain values, qualities of character, and capacities. Those values, qualities, and capacities must be central to one's whole life and being.

This means that it is not possible to practice a commonwealth life-style in one area of life—say on the job or in a civic organization—and yet remain acquisitive or unmindful of the fascism of a political-economic system, or remain tyrannical in one's personal relationships.

This also means that a commonwealth, by its very nature, cannot be given to us by decree, or mandate, or vote, or constitution, or even political revolt. It is a capability for discovering the truth and making group decisions which we must achieve for ourselves and which then requires continual effort and vigilance. A commonwealth is not an end to be achieved once-and-for-all and handed from one generation to another. It is a continually adaptive process used by people in ordering their lives toward critical common goals such as constitutional liberties. Each generation's goals change, so a commonwealth life-style is a process which is never completed or achieved, any more than the process of learning is something we get the hang of and then stop doing.

"So history, namely change, has been mainly due to a small number of 'seers,'—really gropers and monkeyers—whose native curiosity outran that of their fellows and led them to escape here and there from the sanctified blindness of their time."

James Harvey Robinson, The Mind in the Making: the Relation of Intelligence to Social Reform, 1921

Previous Efforts Toward Commonwealth

A considerable number of utopian groups have attempted to create a more exemplary society: New Harmony, Amana, Brook Farm, Oneida, to name but a few. Similar efforts toward a benevolent social order have been made by more advanced persons and groups such as Pythagoras' community at Krotona, Plato's Academy, Jesus' preaching of the sovereignty of a Higher Realm, Hypatia's Neo-Platonic school at Alexandria, and the colonial leaders' creation of the United States. It may seem that these
previous, unsuccessful attempts by a variety of groups to create a lasting commonwealth prove that such a goal is unrealistic. The reality is quite otherwise.

The efforts by the utopian societies were doomed to failure from the beginning because of their rigid adherence to preconceived dogmas and their authoritarian social structures. Whether it be the doctrinaire socialism of Robert Owens, George Ripley's dogma of the abolition of domestic servitude, or the unyielding doctrines of perfectionism and "male continence" on the part of John Humphrey Noyes, dogmatic creeds and prejudices led to the inevitable failure of these ventures.

The creation of the United States Constitution through a coup d'état of a tyrannous group lead by Alexander Hamilton and John Adams, bent on creating a document which would favor the rich and powerful, doomed American "democracy" to failure from the beginning.

"In a very real sense, the Constitution was a coup d'état by the bankers and other 'moneyed interests' who were trying to protect their investments in the collapsing post-Revolution economy."


Earlier efforts by Perennialist teachers or those inspired by Perennialist teachings were primarily for the purpose of preserving humankind and assisting in its intellectual and spiritual advancement and evolution. In some instances, principles and practices of a commonwealth were articulated by these advanced groups, such as Plato's Commonwealth, but the purpose of those efforts was not to create an actual new society but to assist in developing humankind's intellectual and philosophical capabilities so that a commonwealth could be created when that became a possibility and a necessity.

"The philosopher remains quiet, minds his own affair, and, as it were, standing aside under shelter of a wall in a storm and blast of dust and sleet and seeing others filled full of lawlessness, is content if in any way he may keep himself free from iniquity and unholy deeds through this life and take his departure with fair hope, serene and well content when the end comes."
"Well," he said, "that is no very slight thing to have achieved before taking his departure."
"He would not have accomplished any very great thing either," I replied, "if it were not his fortune to live in a state adapted to his nature. In such a state only will he himself rather attain his full stature and together with his own preserve the common weal."

Plato, The Commonwealth, Book 6
The Invisible Saving Remnant

As our present "dark age" grows ever more barbaric, it may be necessary for the saving remnant to organize itself as an invisible group in which to preserve and disseminate the Perennial wisdom. Alexis Carrel, a twentieth-century Nobel Prize winner, thought that such a "survival society" might have to adopt the structure of earlier organizations such as the Knights Templar.

"A group, although very small, is capable of eluding the harmful influence of the society of its epoch by imposing upon its members rules of conduct modelled on military or monastic discipline. Such a method is far from being new. Humanity has already lived through periods when communities of men and women separated from others and adopted strict regulations, in order to attain their ideals. Such groups were responsible for the development of our civilisation during the Middle Ages. There were the monastic orders, the orders of chivalry, and the corporations of artisans. Among the religious organisations, some took refuge in monasteries, while others remained in the world. But all submitted to strict physiological and mental discipline. The knights complied with rules varying according to the aims of the different orders. In certain circumstances, they were obliged to sacrifice their lives. As for the artisans, their relations between themselves and with the public were determined by exacting legislation. Each corporation had its customs, its ceremonies, and its religious celebrations. In short, the members of these communities renounced the ordinary forms of existence. Are we not capable of repeating, in a different form, the accomplishments of the monks, the knights, and the artisans of the Middle Ages?"

*Man the Unknown*, 1935

"You do not know and will never know who the Remnant are, or where they are, or how many of them there are, or what they are doing or will do. Two things you do know, and no more: first, that they exist; second, that they will find you."

Albert Jay Nock, *Free Speech and Plain Language*, 1937

The Supernal Features of the Saving Remnant

We saw in an earlier chapter that though ordinary humans are rapidly losing the ability to understand reality, a small contemporary group is accessing supernormal knowledge through portals into Higher Consciousness. These are the true representatives of Plato's vision of philosopher-leaders and our current conception of a saving remnant. They are making knowledge available about what is actually going on in the world--beyond what the cabal media lies say is going on.
And, of critical importance, they are preserving higher knowledge in books and Web sites which will be available when conditions have degenerated to the point where a rudely awakened mass of people will suddenly say: "How can we get out of this intolerable situation? What knowledge do we need to re-build a sane and progressive world?"

These supra-humans have undergone a spiritual transformation through initiation into a Higher Consciousness and are harbingers of the evolutionary Supra-Human. The foundations of this transformational knowledge lie within the Perennial Tradition. These savants are now creating a saving remnant--a new culture--which is overcoming the current Dark Ages and laying a foundation for a future commonwealth.

After humankind had degenerated during the Dark Ages, Perennialist teachers made available to the West the teachings which spurred Renaissance literature and art, science, and the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment provided the impulse which brought about the American revolution and its transformative documents, the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

These and the additional embodiments of the Perennial tradition--the Hermetic, Platonic, and Esoteric Christian, among others--have inspired humankind ever since and today give proof to people worldwide that a New World is being realized in an invisible way and is overcoming the demonic cabal.

"This Remnant may remind our children and grandchildren of a truth known to our ancestors: individual 'freedom' expresses itself as harmonious, integrated social behavior. If you refer to an etymological dictionary, you will discover – as I did many years ago – that the words 'peace,' 'freedom,' 'love,' and 'friend' have interconnected origins. Our allegedly "primitive" predecessors understood what our college-indoctrinated minds have long since forgotten, namely, that a peaceful society is one in which free men and women live as friends with genuine love for one another."

The Saving Remnant's Secret Weapon: Dialectic

The reason why previous efforts toward commonwealth failed is that the groups making this attempt did not possess an understanding of higher social ordering principles or capability in a methodology by which to create and maintain a saving remnant. A transforming and enlightening group--a saving remnant--possesses knowledge of and experience with transcendent procedural capabilities known as Dialectic: Plato's mystical science which he termed *maieutic psychagogy*:

As we saw in chapter eight, most persons--including almost all academic philosophers--have failed to understand the transcendent nature of Dialectic. They assume they know--from a superficial reading of Plato's dialogues--what this phenomenon means:
merely the debating and arguing that go on in ordinary academic discussion. So they find it difficult to fathom why Plato made such a huge fuss over this element within his philosophical teachings, indicating that only Dialectic made it possible for the philosopher to apprehend higher knowledge. It's a challenge for us to understand what a supernal phenomenon Dialectic really is.

Genuine participants in Dialectic practice an extraordinary kind of shared mystical experience in which they serve for each other as psychagogic midwives, overseeing the process of the divulgence of, the bringing into being of new elements: ontological episodes, ideas, feelings, inspirations, and images. Experienced participants in Dialectic enter an altered state of consciousness.

As is clear from the Phaedo and other dialogues, Plato believed that we can only discover truth when we are in our higher consciousness. The search for truth cannot take place in the ordinary bodily consciousness. Yet academics and scholastics, throughout history, have ignored Plato's declaration and thoughtlessly assumed that what Plato was describing in the dialogues was merely two or more people, in their ordinary state of consciousness, conversing about philosophical concepts.

If we're to take Plato at his word, a dialogue involved the participants attempting to gain a genuine understanding of "that which has true being"--eternal Forms. Since Plato makes it clear that eternal Forms cannot be discovered or understood in the ordinary mind-state, a dialogue can occur only when the participants are in a heightened mode of consciousness.

Dialectic Within the Saving Remnant

As we've seen, Dialectic involves Socrates (or other advanced teacher) helping other participants to give birth to realities from within them. Plato believed that the human soul possesses latent knowledge which could be brought out and elucidated by a special kind of interchange which he called Dialectic--a bringing to birth from the depths of a person's higher being.

Practicing genuine Dialectic requires that there be at least one person at an advanced level within the Perennial Tradition, and prepared participants willing and able to actively engage in the experience to the fullest extent. Such dialogues require that each participant speak openly and honestly, holding nothing back out of fear of contradiction or personal criticism.

We've seen some of the numinous qualities of Dialectic; now we must examine how this paranormal phenomenon operates within a saving remnant. Dialectic is so misunderstood a concept and so arcane in its essential nature that only persons who have experienced this heightened state of consciousness can hope to understand it or participate in it. Some of the transcendent aspects of Dialectic are so enigmatic and inexplicable, that it requires extra-ordinary discernment to understand or practice this methodology.
For example, Dialectic allows participants to communicate by supernormal means which are not completely explained by such terms as telepathy or insight. It's an astounding experience to become aware of the "opening up" of artistic elements (literature, music, art, conversation, humor) simply because you're within a dialectic environment with an advanced person or persons. Even in a dialectical milieu composed of two participants, a book or a piece of music or a painting can suddenly reveal completely new, previously unexperienced--and unanticipated--aspects.

Interaction and communication within a dialectical group evinces an uncommon, supernormal openness, considerateness, and honesty which can be experienced in no other atmosphere. Once a person has experienced this kind of interaction, the "small talk" and inanity of ordinary interchange seems unrewarding and repugnant.

A saving remnant is a group which survives during a time of Pandemonium: anarchy and tyranny. Dialectic, as a supernal methodology for discovering truth and arriving at symbiotic group consensus, is absolutely essential if the group is to gain understanding of what is happening and determine how to respond effectively. That is, Dialectic not only provides knowledge but also discernment as to what strategies will be effectual in realizing the group's goals.

The dialectical process in a transformative, enlightening group has part of its purpose in training persons in the dialectical procedures, feelings, attitudes, and mind-set, so they may become leaders both within the saving remnant itself and also in the larger society. Dialectical training produces these effects:

Participants are better able to "see" and "listen to" others--in the group and outside. Ego distractions no longer blind and deafen us, and we suddenly discern deeper meanings within persons, events and objects, making us capable of responding to them in entirely new, more potent ways.

Participants in Dialectic are more capable of disclosing feelings and ideas, both those which they are aware of when the interchange begins and those newly realized elements which appear as the dialectical process proceeds.

Dialectical interchange makes it possible to come to agreement on facts and strategies in a more comprehensive manner. As the group focuses on questions, problems, and issues, the diversity of thought and understanding within the participants produces symbiotic resolutions and realizations which no other atmosphere can produce.

Participants gain an increasingly effective capability of "seeing" the main thread in a procedure, event, or problem which allows them to lead others in a line of thought or a direction of action that eventuates in enhanced understanding and effective activity. Leadership capabilities within the dialectical setting include discernment of subtle elements such as ambience, pacing, meaning, and resonance. This allows participants to gain the
capability of weaving a common fabric of thought and action, a cross-patterning of all the participants' contributions into a lovely and efficacious tapestry.

One of the major discoveries which a saving remnant makes through its use of dialectic is the most effectual way to leaven the larger society with its own inspirations and approaches, leading ultimately to a commonwealth.

"Take your practiced powers and stretch them out until they span the chasm between two contradictions..."

For God wants to know Himself in you."

Rainer Maria Rilke, "As once the winged energy of delight"

Notes:

1 Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

2 Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859

3 Allegory: the expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths about human existence. Allegories of a saving remnant include these elements:
   Old Testament - captivity - evil captor and complicit captive - release of remnant - rebuilding Temple
   Middle Ages - mind destruction followed by reintroduction of Perennial wisdom
   Poisoned Well - the ethos of a culture becomes contaminated and only those who avoid these noxious aspects survive and can lead the larger society to a higher order of life Rebuilding

4 Metaphor: a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them

5 Analogy: inference that if two or more things agree with one another in some respects they will probably agree in others; resemblance in some particulars between the members of pairs of sets of linguistic forms that serve as a basis for the creation of another form

6 In religion, salvation refers to being saved from an undesirable state or condition. In Western religions, this state is typically one in which an individual faces the prospect of eternal torment in hell. In Eastern religions, this state is typically one in which an individual faces earthly suffering during endless cycles of death and reincarnation.
To keep safe from injury, harm, or destruction: protect
To keep alive, intact, or free from decay: maintain
To keep or save from decomposition: preserve
To keep up and reserve for personal or special use: rediscover

The separation of the soul from its original state of being is not total. Regeneration to and re-attainment of our original state are desirable and possible. Despite the soul's fall there persists in it, although in a condition of atrophy and enchantment, a residual seed of that divine principle which once wholly actuated it. This seed, the latent "divine spark," the "Christ in you" of Paul, used effectively, can bring about regeneration—the reunion of personal consciousness with the Universal Mind. This process of regeneration (palingenenesia in Greek) is an actual transmutation of the psychical and physical elements within our present frail and imperfect nature into a divinized condition.


Ibid.

Albert Jay Nock, Free Speech and Plain Language, 1937

"The Weight of Orthodoxy," MANAS, March 21, 1984

Butler Shaffer, "The Sociopathic Cult," LewRockwell.com, January 24, 2005