

**Rediscovering Plato and
the Mystical Science of Dialectic**

Excerpt

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."

Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 1979

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 Perennialist¹ 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 cabal² 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 *Bhavad 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 Rotschids, 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*

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 Pisistratus 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*