

The Dead Hand of Plato: **On Plato's Theofascism**

One of the most persistent illusions in Western culture is Plato's ideology. According to Richard Dawkins, Ernst Mayr, the great biologist who died in 2005 at age 100, said that the discovery of evolution was held back by "the dead hand of Plato".¹ Mayr is correct. The "dead hand of Plato" is a good phrase. Mayr's complaint about Plato is that he reduces actual beings to mere ideas. Plato claims a cow was created by an "intelligent design" cow, an archetypal cow, a "Ur" cow, living somewhere with the absolute "good" in the divine mind. Plato hates history. He doesn't like the idea of evolution and wants everything to emanate from abstract "Eidos" or ideas, of which everything is but a pale example. This is called "essentialism", this effort to reduce everything to non-existent 'essences'.

This is the third time I have written about Plato. In my romantic and young teens I was enamored of him without having ever read him. I picked up Platonism through Percy Shelley, Coleridge, Eugene Delacroix and Will Durant's History of Philosophy. I did not yet understand how wrong Plato was or how saturated romantic culture is with his anti-science ideology. I did not realize then that Platonism is a quasi-religion that propagates itself through culture. In the 1990's I started questioning Plato seriously and have continued doing so over the years. I think that Whitehead was mistaken that history is divided into Aristotelians and Platonists. There is little excuse to be Platonist anymore. Aristotle is interesting as a historical antecedent to science. But Plato cannot be taken any more seriously than any other philosopher who has had unfortunate influence on history, such as Hegel or Confucius, Shankara or Nietzsche. In any case the two essays I wrote on Plato are here:

¹ Dawkins, Richard. The Greatest Show on Earth Free Press 2009 pg 21

<http://naturesrights.com/knowledge%20power%20book/Great%20Books%20Homer%20etc.asp>

<http://naturesrights.com/knowledge%20power%20book/Plato's%20Cave.asp>

In this essay on Plato I want to record the baneful influence of Plato on Theofascism and traditionalism. In his great work, the Open Society and its Enemies, Karl Popper speaks a great deal about Plato and totalistic systems.² He echoes Bertrand Russell's claim that the origin of fascism is in Romantic thought and then traces a similar lineage of reactionary ideologies coming from Plato all the way to anti-enlightenment romantics like Hegel. Popper points out that Totalitarianism has both its left leaning and its far-right components.³ This is obvious of course and many have noted that Mao and Stalin are not very different from Hitler. Popper is right that the origins of totalism in the West is probably Plato and Hegel, at least as far as systematic exposition goes.⁴ The environmental writer Edward Abbey speaks of the need to turn Plato and

² Popper uses the terms "totalitarian" rather than totalist.

³ Which is why a Guenonian neo-fascist like Alexander Dugin in Russia hates Popper book Open Society and its Enemies. Dugin says he wants to resurrect "Heraclitus [who] called [war or] "hostility" the "father of things." "Dugin hates the "Open society" and wants to return to Guenonian tribalism--- a totalitarian "closed society" and he wants war. He says that between the Open Society and his Guenonian Utopia is 'us and them' and there "is only enmity, hatred, brutal struggle according to rules and without rules, for extermination, to the last drop of blood. Between them are heaps of corpses, millions of lives, endless centuries of suffering and heroic deeds." This is the sort of bombastic and bellicose rhetoric that Traditionalism ends up producing. See also Dugin's The Knight Templars of the Proletariat, an absurd view of history as an excuse for ultraviolent "totalization of the subject", very much the sort of fascism one finds in Plato. He declares that the "doctrinal, ideological defeat of all "open society enemies" is at hand." Here again we have a bogus resurrection of the mythic knights Templars, who really we just a bunch of capitalist gangsters hired by the Vatican.

http://www.feastofhateandfear.com/archives/dugin_01.html

⁴ Early Chinese or Hindu and Roman systems had social structures that were totalistic in certain ways. Islam is intensely totalistic even today in many countries. Arthur Versluis claims that American is not a totalistic state, which is true in a superficial reading of the matter, but not one takes into account all the totalistic regimes the US has created or supported, from Saddam Hussein to Pinochet, to the Shah of Iran--even Pol Pot was largely the result of the US bombing of Cambodia--- then yes, the U.S. has had totalistic leanings and policies.

Hegel on their heads, and I agree with his reasoning there. ⁵ Abbey also notes that those who believe in God lack imagination. Abbey writes:

“If man’s imagination were not so weak.... he would abandon forever his fantasies of the supernal. He would learn to perceive in water, leaves and silence more than sufficient of the absolute and marvelous, more than enough to console him for the loss of the ancient dreams.”

This is exactly right. The factual is what matters. The notion of the “Absolute” is metaphysical fiction. Plato is an escapist into non-existent archetypes. In fact, all there is this earth and the things upon it. Plato created his theory of the archetypes as an antidote to reality and a way of exalting human language as a system of unreal symbols. Giving symbols high status is a way of denigrating all that is not human and all that is not linguistic. This will become Descartes and then Chomsky’s error many centuries later, as I will show in a later chapter.

Mayr, Russell and Popper are far from the only ones to see Plato as a conservative reactionary with theofascist tendencies. Clifford Conner writes in the excellent A People’s History of Science that Plato “represents a political reaction against the Ionian enlightenment, in the interest of the ideal of a slave-owning, class divided, chauvinistic city state which was already an anachronism”. He also observes that Plato hindered the science of his time and “certainly played a significant role in a two thousand-year-retardation of scientific thought.” Conner is right about this. Plato’s elitist philosophy promoted a contempt for the physical world that was anti-science and anti-materialistic. Science was largely the creation of ordinary people, craftsman and women over many millennia. Carpentry, pottery and weaving , metallurgy

⁵ Abbey, Edward Desert Solitaire. Ballantine New York 1968 pg. 200, 219 and elsewhere in the book . This whole book is strongly anti-Platonic and wonderfully so. It is perhaps one of the best, if not the best single book on environmentalism in the 20th century. Abbey does not go as far as Thoreau or as deep, but he goes very far in this book for him. It is his best book too. Henry’s complete Journal is the best book on Nature in the 19th century.

(blacksmithing), math⁶ and writing were all created by ordinary people. Elite leaders like Plato tried to claim them as the exclusive domain of the wealthy upper classes. Plato perpetuate the undemocratic deals of these elites.

The Platonic state in the Republic is a totalitarian state. Plato, like Christianity, Hinduism and virtually every other major religion views the world as sunk in illusion and falsity, and which must use drastic measures to redeem and reorder the world. This system of convincing a population that they are alienated from the earth creates the artificial need of priests. Plato claims mankind is immersed in a "barbaric slough", (7,530,d) and only Plato's totalitarian philosophy can redeem humanity. Plato goes even further than this, and says that the man that understands Plato's ideas, must necessarily desire to save the rest of mankind out of "Pity" (518,a-b). This strategy of having to create a totalistic institution because mankind needs to be saved is used in all totalitarian states. Hitler, Stalin, Mao as well as virtually all large scale religious institutions have justified their aspiration to power on similar grounds.... Buddhism and Christianity use a similar kind of pretence of caring for others as a selling point for their claim to legitimacy of the need of total power.

Popper points out that in his book The Laws Plato shows hatred of the individual and that every person should never think for themselves but follow the leader.

⁶ Guenon tries to mystify math and make it an elitist and ancient system for initiates. That is false. Plato also tried to mystify math. In fact, Pythagoras, who many try to say was the original mathematician who had great knowledge of the "Mysteries", in fact appears to have had nothing to do with math. Clifford Conner shows that Pythagoras did not lay the foundations of mathematics and that the belief that he did is a myth created by writers such as Proclus, in the 5th century C.E. See Conner, Clifford, D., A People's History of Science, Nation Books 2005, pg. 139

The second passage, also from the *Laws*, is, if possible, even more outspoken. It should be emphasized that the passage deals primarily with military expeditions and with military discipline, but Plato leaves no doubt that these same militarist principles should be adhered to not only in war, but also 'in peace, and from the earliest childhood on'. Like other totalitarian militarists and admirers of Sparta, Plato urges that the all-important requirements of military discipline must be paramount, even in peace, and that they must determine the whole life of all citizens; for not only the full citizens (who are all soldiers) and the children, but also the very beasts must spend their whole life in a state of permanent and total mobilization. 'The greatest principle of all', he writes, 'is that nobody, whether male or female, should ever be without a leader. Not should the mind of anybody be habituated to letting him do anything at all on his own initiative, neither out of zeal, nor even playfully. But in war and in the midst of peace - to his leader he shall direct his eye, and follow him faithfully. And even in the smallest matters he should stand under leadership. For example, he should get up, or move, or wash, or take his meals . . . only if he has been told to do so . . . In a word, he should teach his soul, by long habit, never to dream of acting independently, and to become utterly incapable of it. In this way the life of all will be spent in total community. There is no law, nor will there ever be one, which is superior to this, or better and more effective in ensuring salvation and victory in war. *And in times of peace, and from the earliest childhood on* should it be fostered - this habit of ruling others, and of being ruled by others. And every trace of anarchy should be utterly eradicated from *all the life of all the man*, and even of the wild beasts which are subject to men'.

These are strong words. Never was a man more in earnest in his hostility towards the individual. And this hatred is deeply rooted in the fundamental dualism of Plato's philosophy; he hated the individual and

his freedom just as he hated the varying particular experiences, the variety of the changing world of sensible things. In the field of politics, the individual is to Plato the Evil One himself." (*Open Society* pg 101)

Plato is a totalitarian and both like Hitler Mao or Stalin. The ideal ruler or savior, as it were, in Plato's Republic is the "guardians" or Philosopher Kings, who are the "king bees and leaders of the hive". (7,520,b) These rulers, Plato tells us, must "have proved themselves in both war and philosophy." Caste is metaphysics in Plato. This conjunction of war and philosophy is interesting because it shows the relation of Plato's metaphysic to the will to power. The philosopher must be a warrior because the world does not conform to his beliefs. Plato's visionary Utopia, like all Utopias, must be imposed by force. Children are to be taken by force from their parents and given to the state to raise; labor is to be forced also; slavery is a norm; and a caste system is recommended to be as rigorous as the Hindu system. The Guardians are the nearly divine overseers of a totally planned society, like the Brahmins in India or the Priests in Egypt.....

In Plato's Republic he recommends, like the Hindus and Hitler, selective breeding, caste eugenics, rigorous social control and a doctrine of mind control that would oversee the intimate behavior and thoughts of all citizens in his 'utopia'. Like Himmler⁷ and the Hindus, Plato devalues both men and the world to make it conform with a vision of intellectual supremacy. He notices only the benefits of this system of knowledge and power and does not consider the victims against which it perpetuates its violence.

⁷ In his biography of Himmler, Peter Padfield notes that Himmler was devoted to the Hindu text, the Bhagavad Gita, and "he never went anywhere without it". Padfield notes that this fact is "important for any attempt to understand what Himmler believed he was doing" The question arises then: why should this Hindu text, obscure in Germany during Himmler's time, be connected in a fundamental way to one of the worst atrocities in history? Robert Oppenheimer also quotes this book to justify the killing done by the Atom bomb in Nagasaki.

Guenon and his traditionalist followers are Platonist, and like Plato they are ‘counter-revolutionaries’ in the sense that this phrase was used to describe Hitler and Mussolini during World War 2. Guenon creates his spiritual theofascism to be organized around a social elite who defend caste system. It might be worth noting Schuon’s third wife told me that Schuon compared himself to Plato and Shankara and thought Plato the “perfect metaphysician”.

⁸.....

Karl Popper notes that Plato’s development of an unjust caste system occurs as part of Plato’s effort to create a religion for his Republic. “The Myth of Blood and Soil”, ⁹is a foundation myth for the society and the basis of the Platonic state. In the myth the rulers will be the upper caste and have gold in their veins; the warriors will have silver; the producers have iron or brass—in short a hereditary caste system. Once the people are fashioned, they cannot change their basic characteristics, nor can they ignore their responsibilities to the soil. In other words, there will be a kind of eugenics and justification of slavery. This is justified by Socrates as follows. Socrates says, “could we fabricate one of these handy lies....with the help of one single lordly lie we may, if we are lucky, persuade even the rulers themselves, but at any rate the rest of the city”¹⁰

Popper deduces from Plato’s need to found his Republic on a lie that:

“nothing is more in keeping with Plato’s totalitarian morality than his advocacy of propagandistic lies” at the basis of his system. Popper later notes that

“the more we try to return to the heroic age of tribalism, the more surely do we arrive at the Inquisition, at the Secret Police and at romanticized

⁸ But Schuon worried that his style was much dryer than Plato...which it is

⁹ Republic IV. 414-415 etc. (some call it the Myth of Metals)

¹⁰ Popper Karl, Open Society and its Enemies. Pg 140

gangsterism. Beginning with the suppression of reason and truth, we must end with the most brutal and violent destruction of all that is human”.¹¹

Plato, arch-gnostic and primary source of the traditionalists is thus one of the origins of the totalistic idea, which lead to the horrors of the Christian Inquisition, and later atrocities. Plato is an important source for Islamic ideology, as can be seen in Rumi and Ibn Arabi, who used Platonic ideas to bolster his doctrine of the ‘unity of being’. Indeed, Plato and Muhammad are both poets who share a hatred for poetry, as both want only their particular systems of delusion to prosper. Muhammad actually killed poets he disliked, whereas Plato condemns them in his books, particularly Homer, who is a more interesting recorder of myths than Plato in many ways.

So what amazes me about Popper as well as Conner’s understanding of Plato is that both of them correctly deduced that Plato is an extreme reactionary and that he is a force against science and enlightenment. Schuon and Guenon and religion in general are Platonists who seek to undermine science. The whole notion of transcendence is fictional. There is no such thing. The claim to transcend is merely a fictional form of “inwardness”, or mental removal from a situation. The inward mystic seeks to project himself on the universe by emotional self-magnification and narcissism. “Transcendence is this projection; it has no reality but is merely mental or emotional dialation. I have seen this time and again with people in religions, cults, New Age poets as well as astrologers, Jungians and wanna-be goddesses¹². Reason is thrown out the

¹¹ Ibid. pg 200

¹² The growth of the “Goddess” religion in the last 40 years is an interesting phenomena. I do not know if it has been systematically studied, It was clearly engendered by feminism and it is a reaction to the patriarchal nature of most of the religions, One wonders if “theology is really less fictional that theology, and if the archeological work of Marija Gimbutas has anything truthful about or as her critics claim, is if mostly wishful thinking. She did identify a huge number of ancient statues but whether they are goddess

window and feeling is worshiped in a narcissistic mirroring of inner states. The worship of what one feels 'within' becomes a religion for some of these people. This way of escape, supported by such poets as Robert Bly, Coleman Barks, Rumi and Rilke is a way or irresponsible escapism and denial of the facts of our actual lives and the conditions of the world we live in. Their flight to the 'beyond' becomes an escape from the real.

What matters is the fact of the earth the actual lives we live. What matters is life, not the deaths we suffer, not imaginary deities, not dreams. Death offers no transcendence. The effort to set up religions merely sets up another cloudy mystification of human centered ignorance and arrogance. Efforts at transcendence of the earthy condition merely wastes the earth's substance. Transcendence must be transcended (gotten over with) if there is to be any improvement in our condition here on earth.

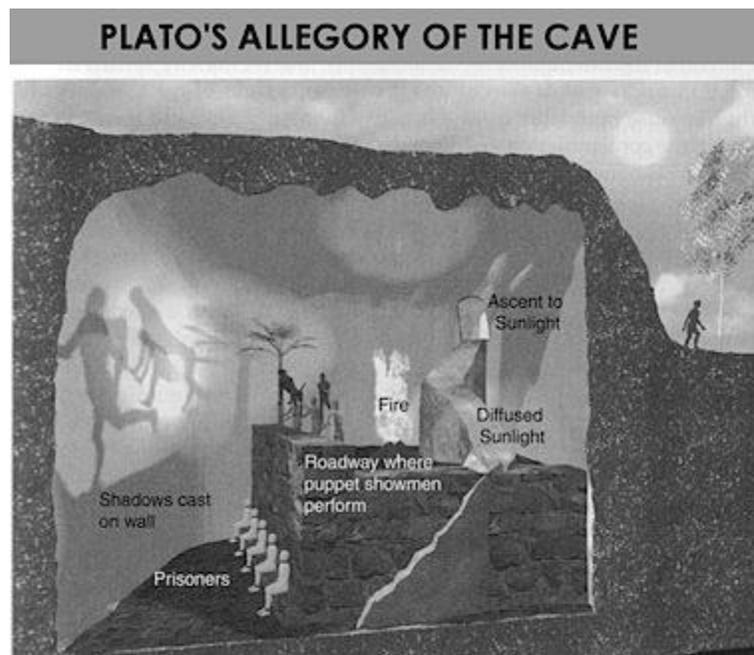
There are many writers on religion who invoke Plato as their model. Schuon, Guenon, Coomaraswamy, Wolfgang Smith, Arthur Versluis, Eric Voegelin, as well as romantic philosophers and poets going back centuries. I recently read Arthur Versluis book, New Inquisitions, Heretic Hunting and the Intellectual origins of Modern Totalitarianism. I will review parts of it below. However, here I note that he ends this disappointing book with a paean to Plato's horrible and backwards totalistic "vision" or the Allegory of the Cave. Plato is a regressive and cramped thinker.

As I wrote many years ago regarding the Cave of Plato:

"Plato had it wrong. The world is not a dank, dark cave of illusions. One could even say that Plato had it backwards. The illusion is Plato's dream of total knowledge. His sunlit world of Ideas existing like

statues or not is another question. Gimbutas has been criticized for creating an archaeology can slip into reflecting what she wanted to see, though it is probably true that male deities were created that sought to destroy pagan goddesses. This is the usual power play of mythology. But archeology does need to protect itself from the sort of abuse that seeks to make a religion of past religious objects..

diamonds of purity in the Mind of God seems nothing more than the dream of aristocratic supremacist longing for transcendent power. Plato's universal "ideas" are merely verbal generalizations created out of facts in this world. He was wrong to generalize particular facts into universal Abstract Ideas. Something that is "good" is not an emanation or radiation of an idealized "Good". A particular tree is not an example of an "ideal tree". Plato made the mistake of falling in love with the creations of his own imagination. The gods or the "ideas" are the images on the wall of the cave in Plato's metaphor.



Because the world did not fit his dream,¹³ Plato fell to despising the world that we actually live in. His myth of cave is a lie. The exact opposite is the truth. It is the reverse of reality. The world that is not the dream of

¹³ I found this picture online and thought it marvelously clear, so I use it here, but I was unable to determine who made it, to give attribution for it.

the Good becomes, in Plato's vision, a bad world—a "slough"-- and needs to be reordered by force. The philosopher becomes a warrior because the world does not fit his idea and the Philosopher-kings are the tyrants who will reorder reality to force it to conform to Plato's vision.....

Plato and his followers ended up himself being a cave from which we must escape. Religion is the cave form which we must escape. Neither Plato's Cave of shadows nor the false idealization of Plato's imaginary "divine" world of the Ideas is real. It is gods and ideologies that are the shadows on the wall. I have turned Plato's Cave inside out and it is his "Ideas" and the myths of his religion and philosophy that would enchain people. It is Plato himself who is the cave of false idols. His archetypes are false idols. The world of sunshine and trees and deer in the forest is not Platonic. These are real. Plato's world is not my world. Rejecting Plato brings one out of his cave of gods and idols into the light of the real world. An imperfect world without Plato's Cave or his Utopia is world enough for me."

I wrote this 18 years ago, in 1992. I am gratified to see it supported in many of its details in Karl Popper's critique of Plato in The Open Society and its Enemies and in Conner's People's History of Science. Popper wrote later about writing his book that

"in giving a detailed description.... of Plato's political philosophy, I was, more and more overwhelmed by the quite unexpected flood of evidence in favor of what I may perhaps loosely illustrate here by the admittedly absurd equation: Plato = Hitler

I agree that the equation is absurd,--- absurd but true. Popper says, all his attempts to refute it "led to meager results". Plato influence is much larger

than Hitler's and longer, so a though refutation of his ideological system is that much more important. Therefore, Popper concludes that Hitler is a "clownish exponent" of the "pernicious and more serious movement" that was initiated in Plato's Republic. This was Bertrand Russell's belief as well. I agree with both Russell and Popper. The imagination is a questionable entity.

Schuon and Guenon are also "clownish exponents" of Plato. Totalism or theofascism seems an absurd thesis until you begin to see the mass of irrefutable evidence that is at the basis of it. The equation of "Plato= Hitler" really means that the transcendental and the spiritual are "noble lies" that are foisted on populations to insure that elites—be they Hindu Brahmins, Dalai Lamas, Hitler's SS or Europe's aristocratic Catholics--- stay elite. The 'masses' of ordinary folks are kept in poverty and want. Clifford Conner is right that Plato system was a significant factor in prolonging the dark ages and medieval ignorance and thus of holding back the development of science. It is this same outmoded and I believe, discredited, anti-scientific Platonism that the traditionalists have sought to revive in the 20th century. Platonists have also tried to reintroduce this reactionary ideology in our universities, as I will show in a chapter below.