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June 27, 2022



The Illumination: A Path Out of the Cave.

Are you ready to venture out of the cave of shadows to witness the light?

What Plato and Socrates discussed during their time together in Athens, especially in relation to knowledge, truth, and reality, echoed throughout time. Author Arthur Herman understands their

sustainable posturings and takes his readers on an adventure to trace these echoes which have shaped history in every conceivable way: “Mysticism versus common sense; religion versus science; empiricism versus idealism...two contrasting but highly influential worldviews that have shaped our world, in a perpetual struggle for the soul of Western civilization” (Herman 2013, xxi).

Herman begins his tome with the first true philosopher, Socrates, who went beyond the mantra at Apollo at Delphi to “know thy self” and answered, “what am I?” After buzzing around Athens for years, discerning the essence of important values, Socrates discovered the essence of oneself. The self is the soul. Herman reiterates that “To be a human is to have a soul, Socrates and Plato tell us. Our soul is our true essence, our true identity. It is the soul that actively seeks to unlock the mysteries of the world, including the truth about reality” (Herman 2013, 16).

Plato turned to Pythagoras for his most mysterious work entitled *Timaeus*. Plato used geometry to decipher the world’s origin, including the world’s soul. Aristotle must have heard this lecture and taken it to heart, as math and science became the basis for his philosophical pursuits. The author then illustrates the break between Plato and Aristotle after Plato’s death in 347 BC. After Philip of Macedon routed Greek city-state forces, Aristotle wisely left for Atarneus and later the island of Lesbos. Dismissing Plato’s mystical search for operating in the Heavens, Aristotle became a realist, a man searching for concrete answers in the visible world and ultimately the father of science.

Aristotle was interested in Nature and stated there are certain basic principles within the ever-changing rich system that is the world around us. There is an *energia* and dynamism that Aristotle sought to understand that relates to causes. Rather than searching for the ideal, Aristotle remained grounded in empiricism. Aristotle wasn’t particularly interested in man’s souls or God but did impact other mega thinkers as Herman explained, like St. Thomas Aquinas and his *Summa Theolgoica*. The idea of Unmoved Mover or Prime Mover traces directly back to Aristotle who wrote about God’s existence outside time and space, “knowable through the effects of His rational presence” (Herman 2013, 51).

While Plato wants to understand the human heart, Aristotle asks “what is man’s purpose?” Happiness is the end goal accomplished via virtuous habits striking the right portion between conflicting impulses or choices. Aristotle opened a major pathway to Western behaviorism.

Each chapter begins with an interesting anecdote devoted to a person, a place, or an event as Herman interweaves tales from history and how they relate back to either Plato or Aristotle in some fashion. Like a builder constructing his log cabin, Herman illustrates how each chapter fits together to build the house’s frame. One side requires Plato, while the other is held up by Aristotle. Together they produce a home for Western civilization.

For instance, Plato based his most famous work on the Spartan commune. By attempting to marry profound philosophical thought with collective dictates, Plato unwittingly produced a playbook for future romantics like Rousseau, who greatly admired Sparta and Plato. Rousseau's work led directly to the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror. Plato's utopian plans were also a fountainhead for the Soviet Communists and the expulsion of tens of millions via merciless despots.

After detailing the fall of Constantinople, Herman describes how scholars fled the bloodstained streets and scattered in all directions looking for a safe haven to continue the Western tradition. Many turned to Plato in their quest to unlock "the secrets to human creativity" and thus began the Renaissance. One would think Aristotle's scientific and mathematical view of the world would end. Low and behold, the Enlightenment arrived and with it the return of Aristotle and his empiricism guiding philosophers like Locke, mathematicians like Descartes (clear and distinct), or scientists like Newton.

Other chapters underscore the importance of both Plato and Aristotle. The United States owes much of its development to both philosophers, in particular, Aristotle. The very beginning of America, Herman argues, originates from the Platonic ideal of a "shining city on a hill" and the pursuit of Protestants finding freedom of religion as well as liberty. Yet, factual dynamism is more Aristotelian. Even the idea of America's government derives from the idea of balance and moderation, grounded in Aristotelian logic to counterweight man's avarice with a checked government found in the one, few, and many.

Additionally, the Supreme Court, birthed from Aristotle's resistance to the rule of tyranny as well as virtuous ethics, is grounded in the idea of 'innocent until proven guilty'—unless you are Socrates. This derives from Aristotle's desire for the facts and investigations prior to making permanent decrees. Consequently, our forefathers recognized this power as a form of tyranny and drafted the US Constitution to separate government into three equal branches of government. "Aristotle's free society is one in which the citizens participate in their government rather than submit to it. All will be rulers in one way or another, at one time or another. This means some rule, and others are ruled, in turn, as if they had become, for the time being, different persons." Aristotle is the baseline for why the United States is a representative republic rather than a chaotic democracy.

Herman reminds his readers there is a constant yin and yang, a battle of two very different kinds of philosophic ideas at play over the past 24 centuries that compete and complement one another in a repetitive cycle. After reading the Cave and the Light, you feel as if Hermann pulled you up, up, and out of the cave to make contact with the light, setting you free from the darkness called unawareness. Readers will take with them a new understanding and appreciation for both Plato and Aristotle as they complete Herman's journey of the past 2,500 years to know that all of history is connected, in one way or another, to these magnanimous philosophers.