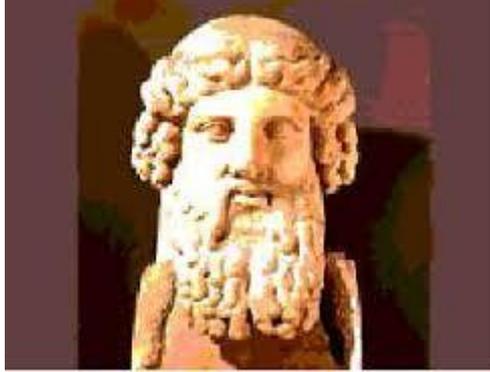




13. PLATO

Plato (428/427 B.C.) was born in Athens from an illustrious noble family: His father was descendant of Codrus, the last King of Athens and his mother of Solon¹. Therefore he had an aristocratic education.



Plato

He had Socrates as teacher and, in his works he transmitted the thought and the personality of the philosopher. However, Socrates cannot be considered Plato's *dīkṣāguru*, because he always refused to be initiated to the Mysteries. Socrates was spontaneously possessed by a “genie” (δαίμων, read *dàimon*), a kind of *gandharva*, who guided him in his moral choices. So Socrates was Plato's teacher in what concerns behavior and virtues, without transmitting him any method or a metaphysical doctrine. "Socrates met in Athens with a *Hindū* who asked him what kind of philosophy he practiced. Socrates replied that he was investigating the man. The *Hindū*, laughing, replied that he could not know the human things if he ignored the divine ones.”²

Also Plato's birth, like Pythagoras' one, was related to God Apollo: in fact, according to Diogenes Laertius³, he was born the same day and the same month of the God.

Following the footsteps of Orpheus and Pythagoras, Plato also traveled to Egypt where he came into contact with initiatic organizations. He stayed for a long time in “Magna Greece”, especially in Taranto where Archytas was the chief of the Army (στρατηγός, read *strategòs*). Archytas became his *guru* and initiated him to Pythagorean Mysteries. He also visited the city of Syracuse, where the Pythagorean community was active. Three times, he had been received at the court of the Tyrants of Syracuse: he hoped to realize there the perfect city (Καλλίπολις, read Kallipolis), governed by virtuous and righteous men, as he had longed for in his *Republic* and *Laws*. However, he couldn't fulfill his dream for the pettiness of the men.

He asserted that the right State, governed by righteous men, could provide every citizen with adequate cultural and social formation. In the society everyone had to play a role (*svadharmā*) according to his own qualifications and abilities.

The social levels had to be three: few people, qualified by nature and educated to love for wisdom (i.e. philosophy), had to rule for the common good. Others, holding spontaneous courage, had to fight for the defense of the city. The third and largest number of citizens had to deal with handicrafts and productive jobs useful to everyone.

One of the most important points of the Platonic thought is expressed by the “Allegory of the Cave”⁴ which explains the intellectual diversity among men. All men live tightly chained into a dark cave and

¹ Athenian Legislator (638-558 B.C.). As our readers can remember, Solon went to Egypt where he learned the history of Atlantis.

² Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelii.*, XI, 3, 28.

³ Greek writer probably lived in the 3rd century A.D.





they are forced to look at the bottom wall. Behind them there is the entrance; the sun shines outside. Outside the cave, several things are passing by and men can only see the shadows projected on the bottom of the cave. Shadows are the apparent images that men see. Instead, the real things, called ideas (ἰδέα read *idea*, or εἶδος, read *éidos*⁵) are universal⁶, eternal, necessary entities, endowed with autonomous reality. They belong to the world of Being, the hyperuranium (ὑπερουράνιον, read *hūperurànton*, i.e. “above the sky”), beyond the cosmos visible to us, beyond space and time⁷. It is a knowable place (τόπος νοητός, read *tòpos noetòs*) only by the contemplating intellect. Therefore it is necessary to distinguish between the World of Being which evermore is and never becomes, and the world of becoming which evermore mutates and never is. Only very few people, thanks to their natural qualifications (*adhikāra*) and with the help of knowledge, are able to free themselves from the chains and to get out reaching the sunlight.



Plato's Allegory of the Cave

The sun, the God Apollo, is the symbol of the Supreme Good, all-illuminating. Then these knowers realize that the only Reality is outside the cave. Inside the cave, men are enveloped in an illusory reality (*māyā*), prisoners of ignorance (*avidyā*)⁸. Knowledge, as intuition, is realized by the memory (ἀνάμνησις, read *anāmnesis*) of the eternal ideas, which are inherent to the causal world.

If the intellect (νοῦς, read *nūs*) is able to remember and recognize the ideas, it is because it existed before coming to animate the body. It had already contemplated the immutable ideas. This is the platonic demonstration of the soul immortality. The wise man, thanks to the memory, addressing his inner sight to the immutable ideas, archetypes of the empiric reality, comes to know himself⁹ and the Supreme Good. All the beings, at different levels, are attracted by the Good because it is an innate idea and, in this way, they participate to their real essence (*svarūpa*).

The three categories of citizens of the Platonic ideal State correspond to the three parts of the soul: the intellect (*nūs*), considered as a divine and immortal spark; the θυμός (read *thūmòs*) producing passions and volitions; the ἐπιθυμία (read *epithūmìa*) to the level of instincts and cravings. The last two elements are mortal and are represented by Plato as two horses yoked to a chariot, which must be driven with determination by the charioteer, symbol of the intellect¹⁰. The soul is the mirror of the perfect city, Callipolis, and *vice versa*.

⁴ *Republic*, VII. 514a–517a.

⁵ Both words derive from ἰδ (read *id*), one of the roots of the verb ὀράω (read *orào*, i.e. to see).

⁶ For instance, there are many empiric men (*manuṣa*), but the idea of man is unique (*Puruṣa*).

⁷ Space and time are within the *avasthā*

⁸ The Orphics maintained that the soul was prisoner of the body (σῶμα, read *soma*) considered as a coffin (σῆμα, read *séma*).

⁹ Know yourself (γνώθι σεαυτόν, read *gnòthi seautòn*): this injunction was the basis of Socrates teaching. The sentence was engraved in the sanctuary of Delphi, dedicated to Apollo. Sometimes in Plato its meaning goes beyond the Socratic psychological and moral interpretation and then it means "know your Self".

¹⁰ *Phaedrus*, 246a–246b. It is evident that in the highest Greek thought there was always a misunderstanding between *buddhi* and *Ātman*.





Plato taught that after the death of the body the soul will be judged for the accomplished actions. According to the faults (*pāpa*) and the merits (*puṇya*), the soul will return to a body, with a series of rebirths and re-deaths until it returns pure. Anyway, in its *Phaedrus* Plato affirms that only the initiate (*dīkṣita*) to the Mysteries, becoming purified, will be able to liberate his soul from the bonds holding him captive¹¹.

He wrote in the *Timaeus* that the Demiurge (Δημιουργός, read *demiurgòs*, i.e. Brahṁā)¹² manifested the cosmos as a body animated by an immortal soul, in the image of a perfect model, without beginning or end, cognizable only through the intellect. This cosmos is like an egg (*brahmāṇḍa*) made up of fire, earth, water and air and contains in itself the Gods and all the living beings (*Hiraṇyagarbha-jīva ghana*): men, animals and plants participate both in an immortal nature (*amartya svarūpa*) and in a mortal existence (*martya bhāva*), with the gross (*sthūla śarīra*) and a subtle body (*liṅga śarīra*). Plato has transmitted to the posterity the description of the origin of the cosmos through mathematical and geometrical relations according to the Pythagorean doctrine.

The Platonic Demiurge is the Divinity manifesting the cosmos made in image of eternal immutable and perfect ideas. He is the one that produces the world, while remaining itself unchanged. He is said good by nature and therefore also the world is good being essentially similar to him. He is the Being, the Supreme Good, therefore he is the qualified principle (*Brahman Saṅga*). We have no evidence of a Platonic conception going beyond this Causal State (*kāraṇa avasthā*). But his oral esoteric teaching remained secret and perhaps it has not been transmitted because in the 5th century B.C. the Greeks did not longer understand the pure Metaphysics (*śuddha paramārtha*).

Many of Plato's works illustrating his doctrine have come to us. He taught according to the dialectical method, already used by Socrates, based on the discussion between questions and answers. He founded his school, the Academy, in Athens where, until his death (348/347 B.C.), he spread his teachings in line with his the Orphic and Pythagorean line of his *paramparā*. Aristotle became his disciple and successor. This philosopher changed the traditional doctrine in a rationalistic way, maintaining that mere logic (*śuśka tarka*) was the main instrument of knowledge. Aristotle's egocentrism pushed him to criticize and ridicule the masters who had preceded him, especially Pythagoras and Plato.

Despite this deviation, the Pythagorean-Platonic tradition continued in the shelter of continued persecution unleashed by politicians and rival profane (i.e. uninitiated) philosophers.

In the 3rd century A.D. in fact, while the ancient Greek-Roman religion was declining before the rise of Christianity, a great revival of Pythagoreanism-Platonism took place, thanks to Plotinus¹³ and his Neo-platonic school. This doctrine and its initiation remained alive in the ancient world and perpetuated throughout the Christian Middle Ages.

Durgādevī

¹¹ *Phaedrus*, 249 c.

¹² Etymologically: the one that works for others.

¹³ Plotinus is believed to descend from an Egyptian priestly family.

