# The Spiritual Foundations of A New Society

## a Theosophical interpretation

A talk at the United Lodge of Theosophists

Sunday 20th October 2019

# Part 1:
# Ancient Perspectives



In a previous talk *"The Sacredness of the Good in Society"* in May 2019 we reviewed Egyptian culture and the ideas of the ancient Greeks and how they affected renaissance thinking on the role of society.

credit http://www.shunya.net/Pictures/Egypt/ThebesLuxor/Thebes.htm

# Old Influences on Modern Society

Here we will interpret the ideas of Plato according to the Theosophical key, and by comparing them to Theosophy show his works are a valuable and well-articulated expression of the once universal Perennial Wisdom, the system that it claims gave rise to the world's knowledge about right living.

It is the views of this old Wisdom on man's possible avenues of development that we will now explore.

# 19ᵗʰ Century Society from a Theosophical Perspective

"Our age… is inferior in Wisdom to any other, because it professes… *contempt for **truth and justice**, without which there can be no Wisdom.*"

*The Dual Aspect of Wisdom* by H. P. Blavatsky, **1890**

Theosophy has been commenting on the social, religious and scientific life of the West for more than a hundred years. Its guidance and warnings about materialism have consistently helped the progression to a better, fairer society than the one of 19ᵗʰ century, albeit there is a long way to go before *Universal Brotherhood* becomes the norm, and man learns how to be a true *co-worker with Nature*.

# Where did we Lose the Truth?

The Theosophical doctrine teaches that several events occurred, and hints they were perhaps a natural result of the advent of the Piscean cycle, starting c. 250 BCE:

- The end of true Druidism in Europe and the closure of the Mystery Schools the Middle East;

- The withdrawal of Esoteric Knowledge from the West, such as from the Alexandrian Library;

- The defeat of St. Paul's esoteric teachings by St. Peter;

- The *apparent* loss of Origin's Reincarnation teaching at the unwilling Pope's Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553 CE.

The last one was said to usher in the start of the Dark Ages.

# Recovering Old Truths

Read *The Secret Doctrine* 2:430 about ancient civilisations…

Robert Crosbie (1849-1919), the founder of the ULT wrote:

"We have not advanced spiritually beyond the civilisations that are dead and gone, but in what we call "advancement" we have made merely another closer bond to physical existence."

We will try show that the greatest old philosophers – we will just take the one best known to the West, Plato – established that to be successful a society must be based on Truth, and value it *above* all. Take the Roman example of great material and technological advance: can we not suggest their society decayed due to it loosing a simple love of Truth and Justice?

# Plato Finds Truth Among "the Forms"

Plato writes that the *Form*, ie the Idea of *the Good*, is the real object of all search and knowledge.

The Good equates to the One, it is the highest Form.

What is a Form? One view is that it is *"the Thing Itself,"* (Hegel). It is not *Its* outward appearance or *Shadow,* as well illustrated in the "Allegory of the Cave."

Plato's other *Forms* are *Truth and Beauty*, but in his *Republic* and elsewhere the "**Good**" is most prized since it "provides for knowledge and truth" (508e), and therefore it is called the highest.
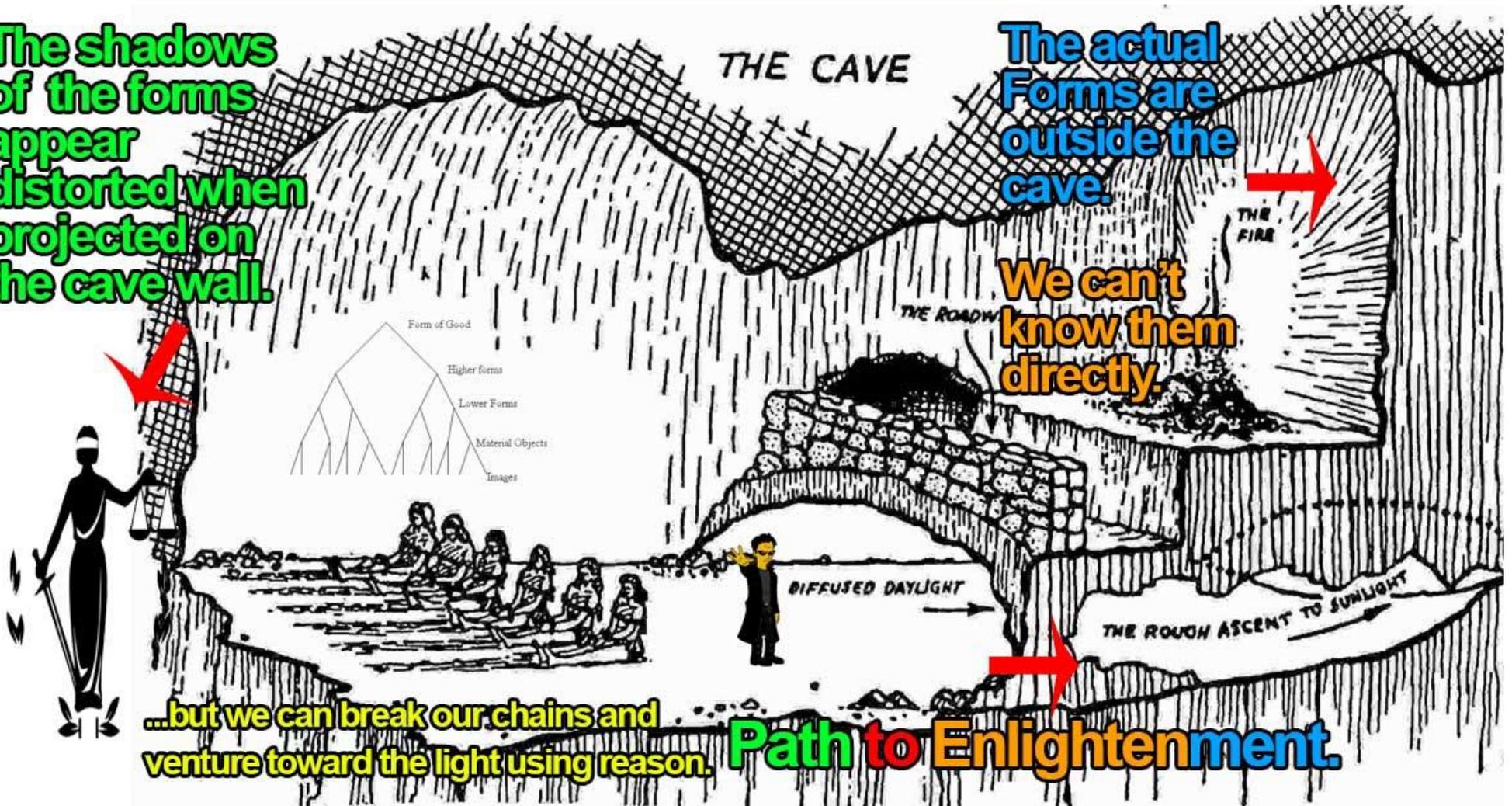
# The Allegory of the Cave (1)



**The shadows of the forms appear distorted when projected on the cave wall.**

**THE CAVE**

**The actual Forms are outside the cave.**

**We can't know them directly.**

Form of Good

Higher forms

Lower Forms

Material Objects

Images

THE ROADWAY

THE FIRE

DIFFUSED DAYLIGHT

THE ROUGH ASCENT TO SUNLIGHT

**...but we can break our chains and venture toward the light using reason. Path to Enlightenment.**

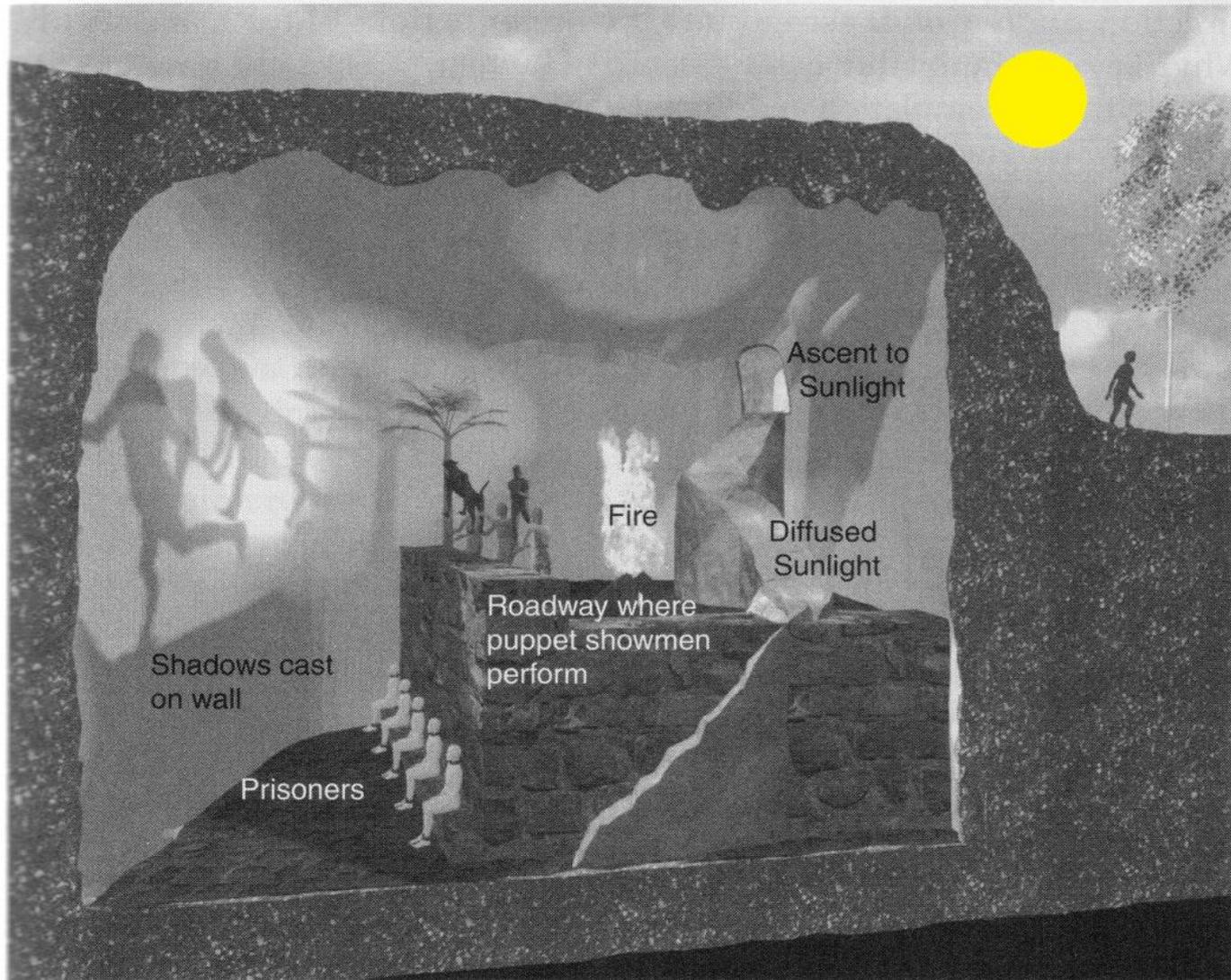From Book VII of *The Republic* in a conversation on how to create an ideal Republic.

Courtesy of http://factmyth.com/platos-allegory-of-the-cave-and-theory-of-the-forms-explained

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# The Allegory of the Cave (2)

Now can we not see the subtle but inextricable connection that Truth has with a better society?

Is it not one that develops the character of its citizens, rather than exploiting them?

## PLATO'S ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

Ascent to Sunlight

Fire

Diffused Sunlight

Roadway where puppet showmen perform

Shadows cast on wall

Prisoners

The natural tendency for man is to regain the state of his original Form, ie to seek 'the Sunlight' an analogy for Truth, Justice and Beauty.

Courtesy of http://kdkchadha.blogspot.com/2010/01/platos-allegory-of-cave.html

# Understanding "the Forms"

Plato's radical proposition is that all natural objects originally aspire to embody *goodness, truth and beauty*, striving – even unconsciously – to silently mimic their original Form. Sin is simply a denial of this.

Further, he suggests that all things that are "just" gained their usefulness and value only from their *Form*.

# Understanding "the Forms"

Plato's grand idea of mirroring the spiritual Form in one's life is expanded upon in the Secret Doctrine when speaking of the SEVEN classes of Buddhas and Avatars. It says that one of these classes will be our manvantaric star and governing influence:

"The closer the approach to one's Prototype, "in Heaven," the better for the mortal whose personality was chosen, by his own personal deity (the seventh principle), as its terrestrial abode." SD 1:638

Lets us see what this means in terms of self-knowledge and how it changes our mental outlook on the world and our aim of life?

# The Consciousness
# We Are a Reflected "Form"

"Here is advice given by many Adepts: every day and as often as you can, and on going to sleep and as you wake—think, think, think, on the truth that you are not body, brain, or astral man, but that you are THAT, and "THAT" is the Supreme Soul. For by this practice you will gradually kill the false notion which lurks inside that the false is the true, and the true, the false. By persistence in this, by submitting your daily thoughts each night to the judgment of your Higher Self, you will at last gain light."

from *Letters That Have Helped Me* by William Q. Judge

# Society is a Reflection of Man
## and vice versa

By continuous study and dwelling on the Good we begin to realise its Form within ourselves. It is by the practice of meditation, right thinking and right living that we improve social conditions.

Plato described a 'good' society as one where we can:

- come into harmony with our neighbour,

- go about our business without fear of violence or material dispossession,

- and beyond that, to have the expectation that all citizens can be helped to attain "complete virtue."

(Commentary on Plato's dialogue '*Laws*', Book 1, Stanford Univ.)

# Morals come from Virtues

In the May talk we saw that sound moral decisions come from an innate knowledge of Virtue; this is an inner voice telling us what is right and wrong, good and bad. Moral questions must be applied to all areas of society, to our Philosophy, to our 'Religion' (our sense of what is sacred) and, especially today, to the world of Science.

If these are not reflected in the institutions of Law, Church, Schooling or Business then the virtues will not inform us and the creation of a just society won't be possible. It is a collective endeavour for all.

By example, Plato tells is our laws should framed to *help* citizens develop virtue, not just the usual aim of simply safe-guarding society from corruption, theft or war; which are all *negative* propositions.

So what are these Platonic Virtues, the positive part of the equation?

# Complete Virtue

For Plato "complete virtue" is when one gains

- **wisdom,**
- **moderation,**
- **justice and**
- **courage**        and preferably in that order.

(Plato's dialogue 'Laws', Book 1)

Justice is a 'human virtue' that makes a person self-consistent and good. Socially, Justice is the consensus of society to strive to become internally harmonious and externally a beneficent force for the common good.

The virtues are a bond holding society together.

# More Laws or Better Ideals?

Regarding Virtue, in *The Republic* the idea is that in the long run it's pointless to worry over specific laws like those for contracts or theft etc, since it is only proper education that ensures lawful behavior, and that poor education causes lawlessness.

It is because passing laws does not *improve* people's character.

Therefore we should ask "Do we need more laws or different ones which give people true education (including on *Karma*) & therefore the chance to become wiser, more virtuous and law-abiding?"

In the Key to Theosophy it is asked where one finds "virtuous, guiltless people, abstaining from sin and crime": in Christian countries or Buddhist lands? A comparative analysis at the time showed Buddhists committing *a quarter* of the number of crimes compared to Christians.                    (The Key to Theosophy, Section 5)

# The two "Goods"

So let us accept tacitly the proposition that Laws are true as far as they promote the happiness and well-being of the citizens coming under them, and bad if they treat only the effects of wrong thinking.

Therefore should we maximise the Good which produces happiness? But this is the Utilitarian idea which had the flaw of sacrificing the few for the happiness of the many!

The subtle error is not seeing that 'Good' is of two types: the *human goods* of wealth and health, which are in turn dependent on the *divine goods*, of which wisdom is first, then moderation, justice and courage.

# Plato & ideas of Karma

Plato also states in his dialogue *Laws* that the human goods of health and wealth are fit for the virtuous person but are bad for the bad one.

This seems to be at odds with a high spiritual philosophy which gives us the idea that all natural beings seek to rebecome their archetypal divine Form, his "ardent turning of the soul to the Divine." However it contains the seed idea of Karma:

"Karma is an undeviating and unerring tendency to restore equilibrium…"

(Aphorism no. 3 on Karma, by William Q Judge)

# Part 2:
## Aspects of a New Society

The present trajectory of society gives us indications of the future, as do futuristic utopian novels such as *The Coming Race* (1871) and *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (1888). In both these we see society as:

- Sustainable and self-moderating;

- Meritocratic (the aristocratic having been replaced);

- Technically advanced but not technically ruled;

- Cooperatively-minded enterprise, with a business model that serves not dominates the whole.

# Reviving Arts of the Past

These Ideals go a long way back in time beyond the Western Age of Enlightenment in 17th / 18th c.:

"... Phœnician vessels had circumnavigated the globe, and spread civilization in regions now silent and deserted… (and) what archæologist will dare assert that the same hand which planned the Pyramids of Egypt, Karnak, and the thousand ruins now crumbling to oblivion on the sandy banks of the Nile, did *not* erect the monumental Nagkon-Wat of Cambodia? or trace the hieroglyphics on the obelisks and doors of the deserted village… in British Columbia… or those on the ruins of Palenque and Uxmal, of Central America?   *Isis Unveiled*

And *The Republic* was a recreation, it was not *new.*

# True Sustainability

Sustainability is simply another expression for the wisdom of learning to understand and become a co-worker with the natural forces of Nature.

The Secret Doctrine writes of the ancient Roman aqueducts that have stood the test of thousands of years, its cement joints being imperishable.

In South America the native tribes knew the secret of building paved paths which need no maintenance for centuries, and which would not be disturbed by the surrounding vegetation.

Theosophy shows how to re-gain this occult Wisdom.

# A Theosophical View of Technology

Technology is a great help in the physical struggle for existence and in poorer countries is raising living standards, as it did in the West.

"Theosophists are of necessity the friends of all movements in the world, whether intellectual or simply practical, for the amelioration of the conditions of mankind."

HPB, 2nd Letter to the American Convention, 1888.

But Theosophy puts emphasis on ethical reforms before providing better means, so it is less likely to be misused. The competitive nature of business can render technology's beneficial effect void.

# Trials and failures

Although there was a gradual failure of the Cooperative Movement in the UK, ending in the demutualisations of 1980s, it is now growing again.

We are taught it is only after many repeated efforts and failures that we really do learn what's needed:

"Remember, thou that fightest for man's liberation, *each failure is success*, and each sincere attempt wins its reward in time."          *The Voice of the Silence*

With power comes responsibility, and failures are the only way to develop the means to succeed.

# Modern Movements

We see these themes reflected in today's context:

- the worldwide Cooperative Movement, (UK, 1700s)

- Transition Town Movement (Cork, Ireland, 2004);

- the Open Source Movement (US, 1970/80s) to share and decommercialize computer code (GNU, Linux, Mozilla), and

- sharing of intellectual property, like Wikipedia (2001) and Creative Commons (2003).

All these movements are collaborative, uncommercial and aimed at empowering the ordinary citizen, and are a radical step forward.

# Summing up, Part 1

We see from Theosophy & Plato, the proposition that

- without Truth & Justice there can be no Wisdom;

- Wisdom gives us the principles of Brotherhood and to become a co-worker with Nature;

- the old Wisdom was disfigured 200 BCE - 500 CE;

- the *Form* is reality; appearances are Its *shadow;*

- objects aspire to mimic their *Form,* the Good;

- meditate on the idea that we are *THAT;*

- the spiritual inner life forms and creates society.

# Part 1 continued

- our laws should help citizens develop virtue;

- "complete virtue" is attaining wisdom, moderation, justice and courage;

- proper education (incl. Karma) ensures lawfulness;

- that the human goods of wealth and health are dependent on the divine goods, the virtues.

# Summing up, Part 2

- future societies can be sustainable, moderate, meritocratic, technically advanced and cooperative;

- sustainability is the art of learning how to become a co-worker with Nature;

- the aim of Theosophy is the amelioration of the intellectual and physical conditions of mankind;

- effort earns its reward when persisted in; failures are the only way to develop the means to succeed.

- modern movements have started to empower the ordinary citizen by cooperation & sharing knowledge.