Plato was a mystic, mathematician, dramatist and philosopher. For him Philosophy is a form of life, a way to salvation involving intellect and courage.

He criticized and condemned the artists and poets for their falsehoods but he often resorted to the use of tales and painted verbal pictures to make certain points. This was particularly true when he was dealing with metaphysical ideas.

"In the dialogues, Socrates leads a sustained and merciless attack against the poets with Homer and Simonides (Rep. 331d-335e; Prt. 316d, 339a-347a; Hppr. 228c; Ltr. II. 311a) the targets most frequently mentioned by name. For instance, in Books II and III of the Republic, Socrates considers the subject of diction and points out that Homer and "all the other poets effect their narration through imitation" (Rep. 393c). The poets are criticized for producing deceptive images and for not telling their tales in the prescribed patterns (379a; 398b). In the middle of the dialogue, images are relegated to the lowest level of the diagram of the divided line. In Book X, the poets are said to be imitators who produce without knowledge of the truth (598a). Deceived by their own images, they are unable to perceive them as "three removes from reality" (598b), "for it is phantoms, not realities, that they produce" (599a). Their imitations, Socrates says, cast a spell (601b) over the audience that charms and entertains them while offering no educational benefit (608). Near the end of the dialogue, he looks back on the argument and decides to banish the poets from the ideal republic. They will not be allowed to return from exile, he proclaims, until a defence is offered in prose, showing that poetry is not just delightful but beneficial to the order of the state (607d). "**Plato's Banishment of the Poets** by Twyla Gibson, Ph.D. Senior McLuhan.

Plato learned from the Sophists, the Ionian scientists and the Milesians but most of all from Socrates. Plato forged a complete philosophical system. He gathered the best of ideas from the Pythagoreans and the other great minds and put together a unified system of thought and ideas.

His theory of reality, his metaphysics was the basis for his physics and that was consistent with this theory of knowledge and of virtue. These ideas serve also as the foundations for his ethics and politics. He combined the thinking of Heraclitus who thought that all things that were real were constantly changing and the world of Parmenides who thought that all change was unreal.

Heraclitus > world in flux ---opinion---particulars

Parmenides > permanence > true knowledge—Universal—primary being

For Plato the particular concrete world is what it is to the degree it participates in the universals which inform all that is real. To get at primary being, the essence of things one follows science and mathematics for they lead us away from the particular to the universal, the patterns underlying and constituting all that is real.

The rational move, reasoning is to go from the:

Particulars to essences

Concrete to abstract

Imperfect to perfect

The soul may ascend to the □sa non□ the eternal □sa n intelligent apprehension of particulars. The soul may become free as it reflects for itself, resign passion for contemplation and fix its eyes on the principles, the ideals, and the eternal forms.

For Plato to know a thing is to understand its purpose: the essence of a thing is its function, this is its GOOD. The essence of a thing is eternal, □sa non the eternal □sa . It is what it is for all eternity. The essence of a thing is linked to the universal and the ideal.

Each element in a human's nature has its function and its end

Soul moral insight GOODNESS

Reason thought TRUTH

Spirit love (eros) BEAUTY and the desire for immortality

Knowledge is not □sa non through experience but through reason. The universals that are grasped by reason are innate and not learned. Rationalism □sa non-empirical process.

For Plato what exists is:

- God (the ONE) – energy of creation
- Mind (nous)- Ideas - the pattern of creation and all components

- Matter –world- the stuff of creation- in chaos until transformed into cosmos by Nous.

Plato's Social Philosophy and Political Thought

Plato preferred the rule of those who are best suited to rule rather than to have people ruled by kings, military commanders, wealthy people or tyrants. In particular he did not like democracy as a form of government. Democracy had killed Socrates. Democracy promoted and rested upon the cult of the average who gather as a mob, constitute a majority and conceive of themselves as experts. There is no impulse towards self-criticism and self improvement in democracy because the mob believes that each is correct and that they are the ones to determine everything by voting. No need to change because there is no absolute standard against which any one could measure. There is only the voting and the rule of the majority for whatever reasons or for no reasons at all. The cult of the majority degenerates to the level of the least ambitious and least suited.

Plato preferred that the whole of society be organized as an organic whole, with each part doing its part to provide for the proper functioning and prosperity of the whole. Those that know best how to do so would organize these social units. Those who are truly the best at doing something would get to do it. This was a meritocracy that Plato favored. In the Greek language of his day it was called "Aristocracy" meaning the rule of the best(aristos). Today that term means the rule of a class of people who inherit their positions. That idea is something towards which Plato was quite definitely opposed.

Humans were composed of three parts and they should also be kept functioning properly in relation to one another as an organic whole, with each part doing its proper work.

- Soul- unity of the whole
- Reason – think, contemplate
- Spirit- desires, appetites, drives, instincts

We must anticipate that the Platonic texts both exhibit and reflect this revolutionary, intermediate phase between orality and literacy. This interface between oral and written modes of thought is considered to be a significant part of the foundation of Western culture itself.

Greek Education and the Transition From Oral to Written Culture by Twyla Gibson, Ph.D.

Senior McLuhan Fellow

"As literacy became increasingly widespread, and more and more of the cultural heritage was documented in writing, the need to preserve and re-create over and over the traditions and memory of the society became less urgent. In time, dependency on the forms of social organization designed to preserve the culture orally receded."

These cultural changes coincided with a number of other social, political and economic factors. The establishment of democracy in Athens in combination with the wealth and curiosity of an imperial society created a demand for formal, higher education in letters, oratory, rhetoric, science, philosophy and statesmanship. This demand was met by wandering scholars -- the sophists, or "teachers of wisdom" -- who engaged lecture halls, gave their courses of instruction, and then passed on to other cities to repeat them. From the start, the sophists incurred resentment for charging all that their patrons could be persuaded to pay. Their costly instruction made higher education available only to the rich and gave those who could afford it an advantage in politics and in the law courts. For decades and then centuries, the oral traditions persisted alongside of and in tension with new forms of organization that were emerging in response to the changing technology. The poets passed on the tradition through their songs and in tandem with them, the sophists offered their education in letters and oratory. Into this historical and cultural arena came three great teachers.[2] "

Eric Havelock: Plato and the Transition From Orality to Literacy by Twyla Gibson, Ph.D.

Senior McLuhan Fellow

"Eric Havelock - who was a visiting scholar at University of Toronto - brought together Rhys Carpenter's evidence for the late introduction of the alphabet, Milman Parry's findings on

oral-formulaic patterns, and Plato's pronouncements on the nature of epic poetry, to support his theory concerning the impact of the alphabet on Greek culture and education.

Following Carpenter, Havelock pointed out that early Greek culture was "wholly oral" and after the invention of the alphabet, there was "a long period of resistance to the use of letters," so that literacy was not achieved in Athens until nearly three hundred years later.[1] Greek "society became literate only by slow degrees" (1986: 29). Oral habits of communication and instruction "persisted long after the alphabet had theoretically made a reading culture possible" (1963: 45-46). Between Homer and Plato, argued Havelock, the method of preserving the culture began to change as Greek education became alphabetized. Even up to Plato's time, he said, the introduction of the alphabet made "little practical difference to the educational system or to the intellectual life of adults" (1963: 38). Since Plato's writings are prose dialogues and not works of epic poetry, Havelock placed "Plato near the end of the great transition from oral to literate habits of communication" (1963: 97). Plato describes a cultural situation "in which oral communication still dominates all the important relationships and valid transactions of life." He concluded that "it is only too likely that Plato is describing a situation which was on the way to being changed as he wrote" (1963: 41).

Havelock applied Parry's findings concerning the oral verse of Homer to problems in our reconstruction of the history of early Greek education. He sought to demonstrate that the "formulaic technique was employed as the instrument of education" by the pre-literate Greeks (1963: 123). He asked, "How did this civilization preserve its laws, traditions, historical sense and its technical skills?" He pointed out that preservation and transmission of the tradition can never rely completely on the "give and take" between generations. To function, a social group needs some kind of "standardized linguistic statement" that describes and enforces a common consciousness, shared habit patterns and collective values. In an oral society, this statement is preserved in the memories of living people and passed down through the generations. The collective memory provides the content of the "educational apparatus" of the group. To become available for "transmission through the educational apparatus, the tradition has to be verbally preserved in permanent and unaltered form . . ." (1963: 290-91). People had to be "assisted in their memorization of the living word by every possible mnemonic device which could print this word indelibly upon the consciousness." How can

memory retain elaborate linguistic statements without changing them in transmission from one person to another and from one generation to the next? According to Havelock, "the only possible verbal technology available . . . was that of the rhythmic word organized in verbal and metrical patterns which were unique enough to retain their shape" (1963: 42-43). Poetry functioned as a technology for preserving cultural identity. It was used by the Greeks as form of education, he asserted, "as a way of preserving and transmitting the accumulated body of knowledge in the absence of writing." Homeric verse was therefore central to Greek education prior to Plato. Not on the grounds that we would offer, namely poetry's inspirational and imaginative effects, but on the ground that it provided a massive repository of useful knowledge, a sort of encyclopedia of ethics, politics, history, and technology which the effective citizen was required to learn as the core of his educational equipment (1963: 27).

According to Havelock, poetry did not mean the same thing for the Greeks that it means to us. Greek oral poetry was a kind of "tribal encyclopedia," an "indoctrination which today would be comprised in a shelf of text books and works of reference." Poetry was the "container" for all philosophy, history and science. It was "first and last a didactic instrument for transmitting the tradition" (1963: 43).

Havelock asserted that poetry was the "sole mechanism" for memorization and preservation in the absence of written record. It served this function via three devices: first, the employment of rhythms and formulas to aid in the recall and re-use of the cultural record (1963: 100), second, through the use of what he called "verbal formulas;" and third, through the reduction of all experience to a great story or a connected series of stories. Poetic rhythm involves consistent repetition of patterns of language sounds. Verbal formulas - what Parry and Lord called types and themes - entail the repetition of "an identical order" in different passages (1963: 82-84). The third device, that of the great story, involves gathering together a number of small stories into a coherent series of episodes focussed around "several prominent agents" who "act and speak with some overall consistency" (1963: 175-76). Episodes provide a "frame of reference, the chapter headings, the library catalogue, within which the memory can find markers" by locating a narrative situation in the context of a huge and compendious story. In this way, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are kinds of

catalogues of the history and the geography of the Greeks. Hesiod's *Theogony* classifies the gods, their functions and families, while the *Works and Days* is a catalogue of "exhortations, parables, proverbs, aphorisms, sayings, wise saws and instances, interlarded with stories" (1963: 295).

Havelock linked Parry's findings on the imitative nature of the formulaic patterns of Homeric poetry with Plato's criticism of the poets in the Republic, and with the negative assessment of art in other dialogues. He pointed out that Plato was claiming for himself the place he was asking the poets to vacate. With the ascendance of literacy, he argued, more and more of the cultural heritage was set down in writing, and the ways of the old tradition were challenged. Plato=s attack on the poets was, according to Havelock, a rejection of the oral tradition in which the bards merely imitated and copied words and phrases without any genuine knowledge of what they were doing. Plato's assault, he maintained, was a rejection of the formulaic style produced by the Greek oral mentality, a state of mind that was in tension with new modes of thought made possible by the effects of the alphabet.

According to Havelock, the transition from oral to literate patterns touched off changes in vocabulary, syntax, and in the basic categories of human thought. The terminology used by Plato and Aristotle to define and categorize the operations of consciousness, he argued, had to pass through a long period of development (1963: xi). He cited the findings of Harold Cherniss to support his theory that "the metaphysical interpretations of pre-Platonic thinkers which are found in Aristotle's own works are in large measure accommodated to the problems and indeed the terminology of his own system."[2] He presented passages in the Republic (522a-530b) as evidence that Plato was creating a new frame of discourse and a new kind of vocabulary. Plato, he claimed, was arguing for an approach that focused not on "modeling and reproducing." He was "demanding instead a discourse which shall rearrange phenomena under general headings or categories" (1963: 259-60). The language of categories and universals, claimed Havelock, refers to what would be called "concept" in modern terminology. He said that Plato avoided the notion of concept or mental construction that would make things like justice and goodness "abstract, arbitrary and relative conceptions of the human intellect." Instead, he argued, Plato saw them as "somehow representing the cosmic structure independent of human cognition and so labeled them visual shapes or

forms." Thus, in the development of human thought, the theory of forms was a transition between the "image-thinking" of oral poetry and the abstract concepts of philosophy made possible by writing.

As the "first philosopher to adapt sustained oral teaching into written discourse," Plato must have been "writing in the crucial moment of transition," from orality to literacy, said Havelock (1986: 111). He emphasized that when orally shaped communication was first written down, "the device of script was simply placed at the service of preserving visually what had already been shaped for preservation orally" (1963: 136-37). Prose conformed at first to the previous rules for the poetic (1963: 39). Even though the alphabet was destined to replace orality by literacy, "the first historic task assigned to it was to render an account of orality itself before it was replaced. Since the replacement was slow, the invention continued to be used to inscribe an orality which was slowly modifying itself in order to become a language of literacy" (1986: 90). After Plato, Havelock concluded, the balance of the tension between the oral and literate mind-sets swung in favor of writing. The end of the oral civilization marked the beginning of our own. "Plato, living in the midst of this revolution, announced it and became its prophet" (1963: vii). "

This from the review of <u>Eric Havelock's Preface to Plato</u> by Anthony J. Mioni

November 13, 1996 Preface to Plato. Vol. 1 A History of the Greek Mind, by Eric Alfred Havelock, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA: 1963.

About Preface to Plato: This book may be seen as a preface to Plato in two ways: The first is that it prepares us for reading Plato by explaining the meaning of Plato's writings; the second is that it prepares for reading Plato by explaining the historical developments that lead up to and influenced Plato. In it, Eric Havelock explains Plato's battle with the poets for control over Greek paideia. Plato criticizes poetry as being restricted to doxa, or opinion, and proposes to replace this traditional paideia with his own based on logos.

PART I: THE IMAGE-THINKERS

Chapter One: Plato on Poetry

Plato argues that the Greek poets (Homer to Euripides), who until Plato's time had been not only the primary but the sole educators of the Greeks, are the enemies of truth and with their poetry spread a mental poison. The deeds expressed in Homer, Plato argues, are hardly things in which the youth should be educated: murder, incest, cruelty, treachery, uncontrolled passions, weakness, cowardice, and malice. He argues that among the Greeks, social prestige is exalted above morality, for immorality is often more rewarded. And it is the poets who are mostly to blame for this. But the problem of poetry is not restricted to its substance. For Plato, even the style of the poets is reproachable: pure narrative, he says, is tolerable, but drama is not--unless the characters in the drama are ethically superior. Plato's conclusion is that the major Greek poets must be excluded from Greek education. But Plato's target, the author tells us, is not poetry as we understand it. It is rather something more fundamental and powerful in the Greek experience. It is an over-all cultural condition that no longer exists. And it is this cultural condition that the author seeks to define in the rest of the book.

Chapter Two: Mimesis mimesis (imitation) works in poetry.

In all verbal communication we can distinguish a descriptive method (third-person narrative) from dramatization. It is in dramatization that impersonation occurs, that is, when an actor puts himself into a role, he or she impersonates or imitates the character of that role. But imitating a base thing (whether it be a man, beast, or other thing) has a "basing" effect on the one imitating. The poet should instead use a minimum of dramatization and a maximum of description. The problem with Plato's argument, Havelock tells us, is that, though the actor playing the part must 'identify' with the character to reproduce him, this does not seen to hold true for the poet. But Plato uses the term mimesis to describe not only the state of the performer, but also that of the poet and the listeners.

In addition to the weakening of the moral character, Plato says that poetry also causes a crippling of the intellect. For poetry totally lacks precise knowledge that, for example, a craftsman needs in the his trade or an educator needs in forming the intellect. Instead, it appeals to the shallowest of our sensibilities. It is non-rational and destroys the rational faculty. Finally, it puts us under a spell, or mob psychology.

Chapter Three: Poetry as Preserved Communication

Poetry in Greek society was always oral rather than written. The audience was one of listeners, not readers. Even in Plato's day we have a primarily oral culture. Poetry for the Greeks is a memorized tradition that depends on constant and reiterated recitation. In order to learn something, it must be repeated again and again until it is memorized. Through this process there is a total participation and an emotional identification with what is being learned. While memorizing the speeches of Achilles (through rhythmic memorized experience), one must throw oneself into the part and identify with Achilles' anger. "Such enormous powers of poetic memorization could be purchased only at the cost of total loss of objectivity." This kind of reliving experience becomes for Plato the enemy. And the main target for Plato is Homer. For through him more than anyone else, tradition was maintained, and paideia was transmitted.

Chapter Four: The Homeric Encyclopedia

The intent in Homer's poetry is primarily didactic, and the tale is subservient to the educational task. In his work, as in Hesiod's, we find the nomoi (custom-laws) and ethea (folk-ways) of Greek society. We find lessons, for example, on how a king, prince, or general should behave; on how to address a priest or any man of importance; the acceptable roles of men and women; table manners; etc. Certain lines like "what is fitting" are frequently used to introduced something that ought to be done. Plato describes Homer's instruction as dioikesis, or the "management" of personal and social life. He even includes technical instructions on subjects like seamanship: in the first book of the Iliad, Homer teaches the techniques of loading, embarking, disembarking, and unloading. This is why Plato states that by popular estimate the poets "possessed the know-how of all techniques." (Rep. 598eI)

Chapter Five:

Epic as Record versus Epic as Narrative Homer's work is a record of what the Greeks in general thought. Thus, a Greek poem was not a personal invention, but was a report that was shared by all the bards. Reading Homer is like walking through a great room of Greek customs, beliefs, etc. It was the way in which these things were reported that made poet's work. "The route [the bard] picks will have its own design." (page 88). And "only in the route he chooses does he exercise decisive choice." Such is the art of the encyclopedic minstrel, who, as he reports also maintains the social and moral apparatus of an oral culture.

Homer's vision, moreover, is encyclopedic. His work is dispassionate and he totally accepts and reports the customs of the Greeks as he sees them. The meter allowed for variation with each recitation. But what varies is the tale, while the nomos and ethos of are kept.

Chapter Seven: The Oral Sources of the Hellanic Intelligence

The pre-Homeric epoc, the Dark Age (about 1175 BC or later), relied for its preservation upon oral tradition alone. This oral tradition developed in this period essentially as the encyclopedic and moral instruction of Greece. Its purpose was pan-Hellenic. Homer's style therefore represents the Greek international style, just as his content provides the tribal encyclopedia for all the Hellenes.

There were three levels or areas of communication: legal and political transactions, re-telling of tribal history, and indoctrination of the youth through recital. "They would be required to listen and to repeat, and their memories would be trained to do this." (121). Thus, the prince or judge would make decisions based on what they remember from the training from their youth. And power came from the ability to speak well.

The educational process: during the day the youth would work with the adults. After dinner the tales would be told. The youth would learn the tales and with them the customs, laws, etc. of their ancestors. Everything was memorized. The minstrel, however, was not necessarily a professional, and they were not always creators of stories, but perhaps just repeaters.

Plato's idea of poetry in this period was correct: it was not "literature," "but a political and social necessity. It was not an art form, nor a creation of the private imagination, but an encyclopedia maintained by co-operative effort on the part the 'best Greek polities.'" (125).

In addition to metrical devices, the Greeks used assonance and parallelism. Intelligence to these men meant "superior memory and a superior sense of verbal rhythm." (128). This made them strive to attain this ability and thus created "the necessary medium in which the Greek genius could be nursed to its maturity." (127). The specific genius of the Greeks was rhythmic. And it was the mastery of musical rhythms that brought the Greeks to master other kinds of rhythms also. Thus, "their supposed disadvantage in the competition for culture, namely non-literacy, was in fact their prime advantage." (128).

Chapter Eight: The Homeric State of Mind

Although we moderns view poetry as not part of daily communication, the Homeric-age Greeks did. "The whole memory of a people was poetised, and this exercised a constant control over the ways in which they expressed themselves in casual speech." (134). When things were composed, they were composed poetically (not first prosaicly). Thus, Homer, Hesiod, and the other Greek poets were not "special" or "gifted" people, like our poets might be considered today, but they represent the normal state of mind of this people. The Greeks thought in this way.

But the poets, in creating tales, had a certain control over the minds of their listeners. Plato, in fact, was certain that "poetry and the poet had exercised a control not merely over Greek verbal idiom but over the Greek state of mind and consciousness." (142). This situation continued virtually unchanged through Classic Greece.