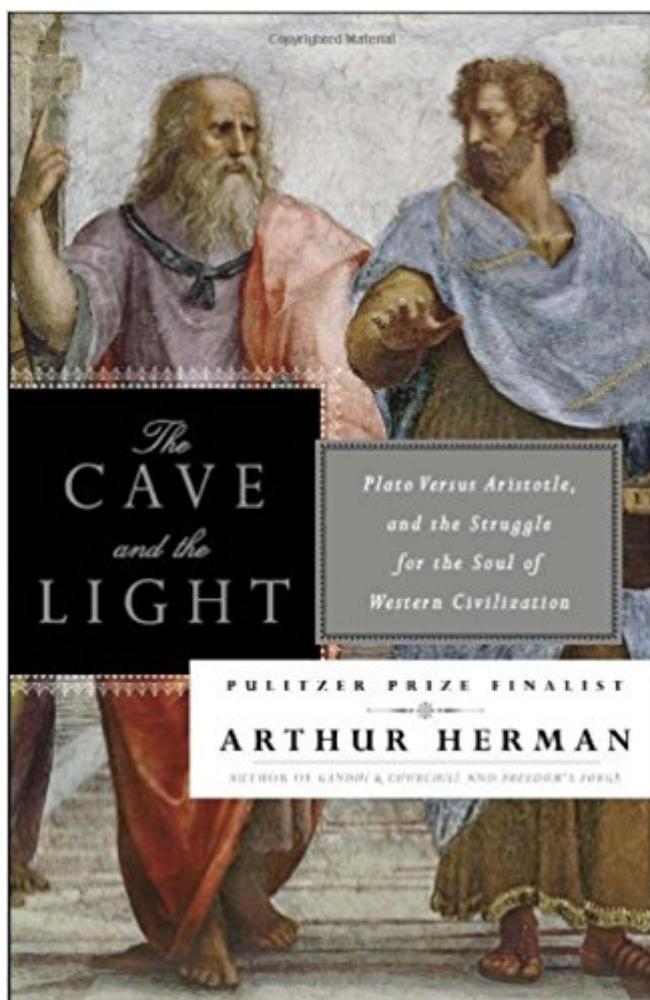


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# The Cave And The Light: Plato Versus Aristotle, And The Struggle For The Soul Of Western Civilization



## Synopsis

Arthur Herman has now written the definitive sequel to his New York Times bestseller, How the Scots Invented the Modern World, and extends the themes of the book— which sold half a million copies worldwide— back to the ancient Greeks and forward to the age of the Internet. The Cave and the Light is a magisterial account of how the two greatest thinkers of the ancient world, Plato and Aristotle, laid the foundations of Western culture—and how their rivalry shaped the essential features of our culture down to the present day. *Plato* came from a wealthy, connected Athenian family and lived a comfortable upper-class lifestyle until he met an odd little man named Socrates, who showed him a new world of ideas and ideals. Socrates taught Plato that a man must use reason to attain wisdom, and that the life of a lover of wisdom, a philosopher, was the pinnacle of achievement. Plato dedicated himself to living that ideal and went on to create a school, his famed Academy, to teach others the path to enlightenment through contemplation. *However*, the same Academy that spread Plato’s teachings also fostered his greatest rival. Born to a family of Greek physicians, Aristotle had learned early on the value of observation and hands-on experience. Rather than rely on pure contemplation, he insisted that the truest path to knowledge is through empirical discovery and exploration of the world around us. Aristotle, Plato’s most brilliant pupil, thus settled on a philosophy very different from his instructor’s and launched a rivalry with profound effects on Western culture. *The two men disagreed on the fundamental purpose of the philosophy. For Plato, the image of the cave summed up man’s destined path, emerging from the darkness of material existence to the light of a higher and more spiritual truth. Aristotle thought otherwise. Instead of rising above mundane reality, he insisted, the philosopher’s job is to explain how the real world works, and how we can find our place in it.* Aristotle set up a school in Athens to rival Plato’s Academy: the Lyceum. The competition that ensued between the two schools, and between Plato and Aristotle, set the world on an intellectual adventure that lasted through the Middle Ages and Renaissance and that still continues today. *From Martin Luther (who named Aristotle the third great enemy of true religion, after the devil and the Pope) to Karl Marx (whose utopian views rival Plato’s), heroes and villains of history have been inspired and incensed by these two master philosophers—but never outside their influence.* *Accessible, riveting, and eloquently written, The Cave and the Light provides a stunning new perspective on the Western world, certain to open eyes and stir debate.* Praise for The Cave and the Light *A* *“A sweeping intellectual history viewed through two ancient Greek lenses . . . breezy and enthusiastic but resting on a sturdy rock of research.”* *A* *Kirkus Reviews* *A* *“Examining*

mathematics, politics, theology, and architecture, the book demonstrates the continuing relevance of the ancient world. • Publishers Weekly : A fabulous way to understand over two millennia of history, all in one book. • Library Journal : Entertaining and often illuminating. • The Wall Street Journal: From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Herman (How the Scots Invented the Modern World, 2002) boils Western philosophy and culture down to two competing notions: the idealism of Plato and the empiricism of Aristotle. Plato, says Herman, asks, "How do you want your world to be?" Aristotle, on the other hand, asks, "How do you fit into the world that already exists?" Walking through two and a half millennia of Western thought, Herman emphasizes that the two philosophies—the material and the spiritual aspects of existence—have repeated themselves through Western history, waxing and waning and remaining in tension with each other to the present day.

Romanticism? Poetry? Totalitarian dogmatism? That's Plato. The U.S. Constitution? The Manhattan Project? Modern consumer culture? That's Aristotle. If it sounds like a sweeping polemic, that's because it is; Herman seems to revel in overbroad claims, particularly when he's talking about modern phenomena. Beneath all the broad assertions and polemic showiness, however, lies a serious argument for the primacy of Plato and Aristotle and the essential dynamism of a culture that embraces both philosophies. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Praise for The Cave and the Light

• Kirkus Reviews: "Examining mathematics, politics, theology, and architecture, the book demonstrates the continuing relevance of the ancient world."

• Publishers Weekly: "A fabulous way to understand over two millennia of history, all in one book."

• Library Journal: "Entertaining and often illuminating."

• The Wall Street Journal: "Praise for Arthur Herman" (Gandhi & Churchill Finalist for the Pulitzer Prize)

• USA Today: "Scrupulous, compelling, and unfailingly instructive . . . a detailed and richly filigreed account that introduces the Anglo-American reader to many facts and vivid if little-known personalities, both English and Indian."

• Commentary: "Freedom's Forge" (a rambunctious book that is itself alive with the animal spirits of the marketplace)

• The Wall Street Journal: "How the Scots Invented the Modern World" (Professor Herman demonstrates an infectious and uplifting passion for his subject. Unlike many academics, he is a natural writer, weaving philosophical concerns seamlessly through a historical narrative that romps along at a cracking pace, producing a text that is highly accessible without compromising the rational quality of his argument.)

• The Guardian: "From the Hardcover edition."

The most enjoyable read I have had in the last several years - and I read a lot! Being an "armchair" philosophy buff I am always looking for new books that will both inform and entertain me. The Cave and the Light is my new favorite in this genre. I will be reading it again soon. Anyone interested in philosophy and history will be pleased with this choice.

Excellent book with a consistently argued thesis. For the breadth of the topic, Herman's presentation is relatively concise and easy to follow. I especially appreciate how he finessed the entrance of Christianity (a belief/worldview of Jewish origin) into the Greek realm of ideas, positing how the pre-existing philosophies of Plato and Aristotle affected interpretation and application of Jewish/Christian revelation without being the original source of it. A good place to start if one is investigating not just the history of philosophy, but different philosophies running through history. I recommend the audiobook if one isn't able to commit to 700+ pages.

Fantastic, an intellectual epic that reads like an adventure story. Human history is certainly more complex than the two person dialectic device represents, but the device is absolutely useful as a tool for understanding, and the author uses it to huge and important effect.

The product was advertised as "acceptable" so I was worried about what it would look like. It arrived on schedule, and it looked more in very good condition. This will be something I will be proud to own.

"The Cave and the Light" is a ping pong tournament over time between a teacher's philosophy and his pupil's. It is a well written journey of man's quest for understanding his role in the big picture; for it strives to answer these questions, by having a transcendent Idea taking precedence over one's rational thought and then the reversal. It goes full circle, for in the end, man flourishes when he has a belief in both the transcendent and his own mind. An excellent read - Kacz.

Very enjoyable. Twenty-four hundred years is a lot to cover in one book, but Herman makes his case for the past (and present) influence these and other thinkers have had (and in his argument, still have on our social and political structures). Bought it on Kindle, then bought a hard copy to share with friends.

This is a delightful and informative read. I bought it because the Wall Street Journal reviewed it so positively. This is a very balanced presentation of the rise and fall of Plato and Aristotle as they cycle through and influence western Civilization. I bought the audio book version which is beautifully read when I cannot read the text. I suspect the author is an Aristotle lover himself but can't be sure as he is so balanced. Superbly done. A helpful insight into western civ. and our times.

This is not a page turner, but it is definitely worth your effort to read cover to cover. This should be required reading for every thinking person. Those who are brought up in non Western cultures would especially benefit from this read.

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