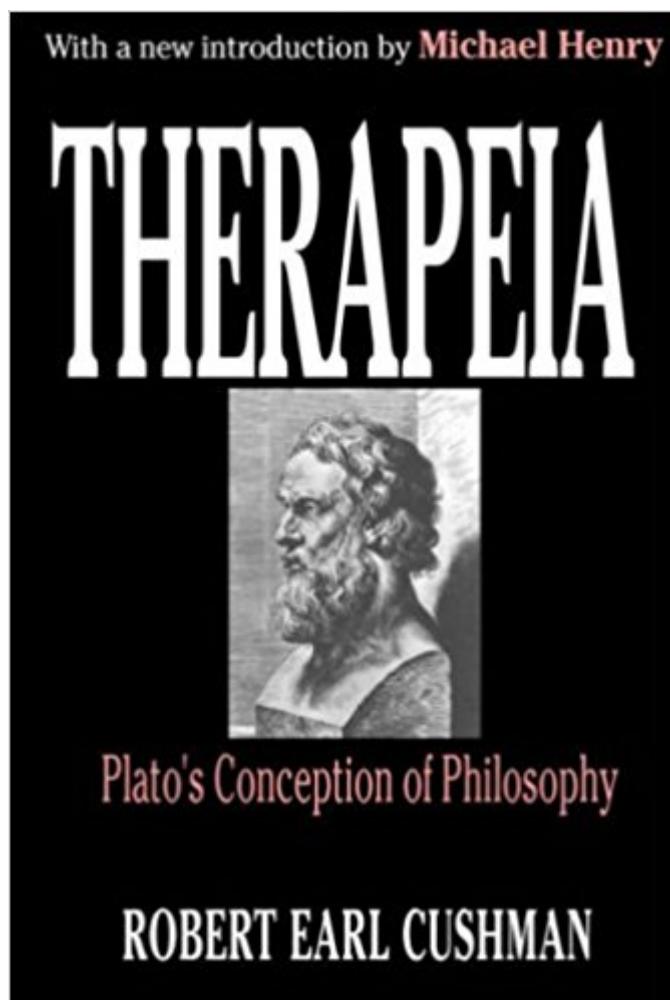


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# Therapeia: Plato's Conception Of Philosophy (Library Of Conservative Thought)



## Synopsis

"This reviewer has no doubts that Dr. Cushman has written a controversial book on Plato and in doing so has not only shown impressive familiarity with solid Platonic literature but is also very much at home with all the dialogues and salient passages bearing upon his thesis."-John P. Anton, Ohio Wesleyen University "Whoever the reader is, he will find a hearty incitement to the articulation of ideas that American thought needs."-L. W. Norris, Saturday Review Although modernity often seems to be crisis-ridden, human history shows that every age is beset by problems. These are rooted in the human psyche and derive from man's "divorce from his ground of Being." Cushman's superb study of Plato illuminates how a transcendently open soul deals with the universal resolution of humanity's most basic spiritual disorder. In *Therapeia* Cushman focuses on Plato's central theme: the soul's search for ultimate fulfillment and salvation from psychological, social, and political disorders. His detailed analysis begins with the critical importance of Socrates as the ideal of the well-ordered and rightly oriented soul, and then considers the essential ontological interdependence of virtue and knowledge. He explores the meaning of anamnesis, eros, and inner conversion, the epistemological value of right belief and its relation to true knowledge, and the proper and improper uses of rhetoric, so that the soul might finally attain the wisdom that flows from its natural affinity for the Good. Cushman regarded *Therapeia* as his greatest achievement. It is clear that he inhabited Plato's mind and steeped himself in Plato's thoughts, while paying due regard to numerous other commentaries on Plato. His purpose, simple in conception but extraordinarily difficult in execution, is to communicate an intense awareness of Plato's thought as a living philosophy. One of the most profound and luminous books about Plato, this book will be of interest to philosophers, philosophy students (graduate and undergraduate), and anyone interested in philosophy in general and/or Plato in particular. Robert Earl Cushman (1913-1993) was research professor emeritus of Systematic Theology and dean of the Divinity School of Duke University. He was the author of *Faith Seeking and Understanding*, *John Wesley's Experimental Divinity: Studies in Methodist Doctrinal Standards*, and *The Heritage of Christian Thought*. Michael Henry studied with Gerhart Niemeyer at Notre Dame where he received his advanced degree in political theory in 1974. Since 1977, he has been teaching philosophy at St. John's University in New York.

## Book Information

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## **Customer Reviews**

?This volume by Cushman is a kind of existentialist's treatment of Plato. It shows a thorough knowledge of the text. ...Whoever the reader is, he will...find a hearty incitement to the articulation of ideas that American thought needs.? -Saturday Review --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Michael Henry is professor of philosophy at St. John's University, New York. He is also the series editor of Transaction's Library of Conservative Thought series. His work has appeared in *Modern Age*, *The Hillsdale Review*, and *The Political Science Reviewer*.

Cushman demonstrates with countless references to Plato's works why knowledge is not just a possession of facts but is in fact an orientation of the soul and an axiological state of being. Knowledge of Truth and Reality is inextricably connected to self-knowledge and the excellence of moral character. Thus knowledge of the Good and the Forms requires that one attempt to become like them as humanly possible. Cushman also explores the meaning and the important value Plato places on "true opinion" and how it relates to "knowledge". He also indicates how Plato and Aristotle disagreed in how to teach knowledge: Aristotle believed that truth can be demonstrated with sound logical proofs. Plato understands that a man's apprehension of truth is a state of his soul, not data to be assented to, and teaching is more a matter of persuasion. This difference shows why the two differed on their evaluation of dialectics. I love this work; it shows clearly how all the aspects of philosophy (that is, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics) all join with the soul's

apprehension of the Good.

This text provides a fantastic subtextual analysis of the Plato's dialogues and theories - reaching down to a level of synthesis that enables the dedicated student to grasp the concrete and the abstractions of ancient thought and dialectic.

I fell in love with Plato when I studied him in college during the 1960's. Among the book I read at the time was this work by Robert Cushman, "Therapeia: Plato's Conception of Philosophy". Published in 1958, "Therapeia" was still relatively new; but now it is unfortunately out-of-print. My interest in the book was rekindled through an online group on Plato and Neoplatonism. Several members of the group, including me, commented on how the book had influenced them and noted that it deserved reading. Returning to the book after more than 40 years, I had only distant memories of its content. The book surely would have been difficult for a naïf to a 1960's college student, and it remained a challenge in my rereading. Even so, the rereading brought back memories of why I was so moved in seriously reading Plato and it also reminded me of why I continue to think about him, perhaps in a different way from in my youth. Cushman taught systematic theology at Duke University for many years and served as dean of the Divinity School. Of his many accomplishments, he remained most proud of writing "Therapeia". The book is a comprehensive study of Plato's works, and it aims to show the theme and conception of philosophy of Plato's many disparate dialogues. His book has a religious cast as Cushman writes at the outset: "Plato's *philosophia*, as a method of education, represents the supreme and most influential attainment of classical Greek thought respecting the way of human salvation." The themes of education and salvation loom heavily in the book as Cushman explains how Platonic philosophy endeavors to provide a way of salvation. The early sections of the book discuss Plato's view of the human condition which necessitates, in his thinking, the need for salvation. Broadly, Plato sees most individuals as caught in their private, partial, selfish goals and projects with no understanding of the meaning and purpose of what they do. Their activities can be described in many ways -- as a lack of knowledge and as a lack of contact with reality. Cushman discusses the many passages in which Plato discusses what he sees as the human condition -- focusing on the famous allegory of the cave in Book VII of the *Republic*. The goal of philosophy is to radically reorient individuals in their view of what matters. Roughly the second part of Cushman's book discusses Plato's dialectical method. The goal is to allow a passage of the soul from the world of becoming and opinion to reality, culminating in a search for the Good. Cushman offers many fresh insights in his account. His study, with its focus on

"Being" has some echoes of Heidegger, although that philosopher is not mentioned. Cushman argues that for Plato human knowledge is "axiologically" based -- meaning it is concerned from the outset not simply with facts but instead has its source in values and ethics. Cushman's Plato distinguishes sharply between knowledge and wisdom. He rejects the view, attributed to Aristotle, that wisdom is a broader, more expansive, and fundamental type of knowledge. For Cushman's Plato, wisdom is rooted in the individual and has what may seem as a highly subjective component. Wisdom arises when an individual searches for the good and tries to reflect within him or herself the good seen as the fundamental encompassing portion of reality. The good is beyond argument or proof but can only be approached through study, thought, and Platonic dialectic and serious sustained investigation. Cushman is aware that Plato discouraged attempts to summarize his writings and his philosophical position. Cushman writes: "In spite of Plato's warning, it is altogether likely that every generation, in its serious moments, will undertake commentary upon Plato's dialogues. The explanation is not obscure. In good part, it is because Plato is less intent on propounding neat answers to the riddle of human existence than on locating the genuinely fruitful questions by the exploration of which others may be assisted to find answers for themselves." The book thus reminded me of a commenter on Plato of a more recent generation who has also taught me a great deal. In 2014, the philosopher and novelist Rebecca Goldstein published her book, "Plato at the Googleplex: Why Philosophy Won't Go Away." Goldstein's broad aim has many similarities to Cushman's as both writers try to show the continued importance of philosophy in a scientific, skeptical age. Both thinkers also look to Plato as their prime source in showing the continued importance of philosophy. While Cushman's book consists largely of an exposition of Plato's writings, Goldstein combines her discussions of Plato with several imagined dialogues in which Plato visits the 21st Century and engages in discussions with a variety of people, including a Googleplex hostess, a talk show host, a writer of advice columns, a psychotherapist, and a neuroscientist. The aim is to show the continued importance of Plato and of the type of questions he formulated. At a basic level, Cushman and Goldstein agree on much in their discussion of Plato. Cushman, I think, would agree with the following passage from Goldstein on philosophy's purpose. "And what is it, according to Plato, that philosophy is supposed to do? Nothing less than to render violence to our sense of ourselves and our world, our sense of ourselves in the world." There are also many disagreements between Cushman and Goldstein. Goldstein understands Plato and Greek thought as within the spirit of contemporary secularism. She almost surely would reject the theological, religious tone of Cushman's study. Also, Goldstein would reject, I think, the tone of subjectivity in Cushman's book. Her Plato is a continuous, secular questioner who wants to use

reason to find the truth more than to delve into one's self and individuality. I doubt if she would agree with the portion of Cushman's study placing the therapeutic goals of philosophy beyond reason. I learned a great deal from reading Cushman again and from thinking about Plato as he and Goldstein, in their ways, understand him. I probably see these issues somewhat differently than I did when I was young. Both Cushman and Goldstein are excellent guides to readers who want to think about the purpose of philosophy and about Plato. Robin Friedman

Most people haven't heard of Cushman's *Therapeia*, yet this is one of the greatest expositions of platonic thought in any language. It is the clearest, deepest, most sublime understanding of both Socrates and Plato that I have ever read. Cushman sees Plato/Socrates as wrestling with the human condition and offers a cure for what ails the human spirit (Plato's *therapeia*). This is no tame "philosophy" which one is free to embrace or no according to one's inclination. One's salvation is at stake, and Cushman accurately has Plato consumed with trying to ameliorate human suffering and evil. Does it work? In the end Cushman thinks it falls short, and I agree. But next to Christ's message, life, death and resurrection, Plato's diagnosis and *therapeia* are the highest attainments with respect to a way of salvation. It falls short, but in the process it outdistances all other philosophers.

I love this book and have read it more than once as a guide to why philosophy can be a way of life and not just an intellectual pursuit. In this century especially it is like a breath of fresh air. There are some difficult sections to read even for someone like myself who teaches philosophy, but the effort yields insights and actions for philosophy as a way of life.

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