



DIALECTIC AND EARLY GREEK THOUGHT: AN INQUIRY INTO THE ORIGINS  
OF THE CONCEPT 'DIALECTIC' AND ITS INCORPORATION WITHIN THE  
PHILOSOPHICAL FORM OF DISCOURSE IN ANCIENT GREECE.

by

Jim Jose B.A. (Hons.)

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Dialectic and Early Greek Thought: An Inquiry into the Origins  
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## Abstract

This thesis offers an explanation for the emergence of 'dialectic' as a concept within philosophical discourse based on an analysis of the historical and intellectual conditions underlying this development. It is argued that Plato was the first to articulate and explore such a concept as part of his reappraisal of both the form and content of Greek knowledge and values. However, this is only part of the explanation.

The approach adopted in this thesis has been to examine critically the form of discourse in which such a concept arose because it was the very nature of philosophical discourse that Plato questioned and attempted to come to terms with. An understanding of how this form of discourse emerged and developed is crucial for an understanding of the specific issues addressed by Plato.

Of central importance for the development of philosophy was the availability of the technology of a writing system, namely the Greek alphabet. It is argued that for several centuries the Greeks did not have a system of writing. During this period knowledge and values were articulated and preserved orally in what is described in the thesis as the oral mode of discourse. With the advent of an alphabetic system of writing a new mode of discourse began to be established. This is described as the literate mode of discourse.

Within this mode of discourse, new forms of discourse became possible including the particular form that the Greeks themselves termed 'philosophy'. The tensions and contradictions produced by the transition from an oral to a predominantly literate mode of discourse are examined so that the particular effects that this had on Greek knowledge and values can be established. It is argued that these changes, when considered in the context of the political and social upheavals within the Greek world, especially at Athens, resulted in much uncertainty with respect to knowledge and values and the related problem of

appropriate human conduct.

It is argued that Plato regarded this situation as a crisis and devoted his intellectual energy to resolving it. His solution was to reorganise philosophical discourse so that it could provide knowledge and values that were certain and unchanging, and hence provided a proper basis for human conduct. As part of this reappraisal of philosophical discourse Plato was led to develop the notion of dialectic. Oral discourse was integral to Plato's conception of philosophy and the concept 'dialectic'. The winged words of orally based discourse provide the key to understanding how and why dialectic emerged when and where it did.

This thesis does not contain any material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I consent to the thesis being made available for photocopying and loan.

Jim Jose

Winged words do not merely fly between persons, they penetrate the indifference of men and make it impossible to be inattentive to the meaning. Wings take dead words and make them live, by transporting them to the responsive soul of the hearer, the part of man closest to the divine.

John Fisher (1966).