

## Dan Naumovich: Don't be as silly as Plato

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By Dan Naumovich

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I read recently that Plato once lamented the advent of the written word because he felt it would cause people to lose the ability to remember the nuances communicated in our rich oral history.

I'm sure if publishing royalties had been invented at the time he would have been singing a different tune, but as it stands, Plato was just the first of many to predict the downfall of civility due to advancements in technology.

Plato's hang-up with the alphabet seems silly today, especially from someone who would be remembered as just another guy in a toga if he hadn't written everything down. Yet it's not difficult to fall into the same trap of blaming technology for the erosion of things we hold dear.

From ancient Greece, let's fast-forward to the modern age at a McDonald's drive-through on a Monday morning. After moving my car ahead in the queue, I resumed my musing on reason and justice in Western civilization while waiting for a bacon, egg and cheese bagel.

Just then I was jolted from my thoughts by the car behind me whose driver, in the span of about 10 feet, had become distracted and forgot to apply the brakes until her bumper met mine, quite possibly changing the course of contemporary philosophy forever because I think I was on the verge of a breakthrough.

And what do we have to blame for this calamity? A cell phone, of course. At least I'm pretty sure that's what I spotted in my rear-view mirror. Either that or she's extremely myopic.

Perhaps you've experienced similar things. Being stuck at a green light while the driver ahead of you taps out another text message. Having a door shut in your face because the first person through was lost in a Bluetooth conversation.

It's not that people are deliberately being rude. It's that their consideration is elsewhere, being beamed across a wireless network to someone they deem more worthy of their attention.

Stephen Stills once advised that if we can't be with the ones we love, we should love the ones we're with. While health experts advise against such hippie-free-love propositions, the sentiment isn't without wisdom. Perhaps if we can't be with the ones we love we could at least be aware of the ones we're with.

It's not a total exaggeration to say that we live in time when many wouldn't notice that the guy in line ahead of them at Wal-Mart was on fire unless someone texted them a link to the YouTube video that the cashier was shooting with her cell phone. And yet to take to the soapbox against the forces of modernity, as I've done before, is to risk sounding as silly as Plato (I Googled the phrase "as silly as Plato" and found that only one other person has had the gall to make that charge).

Luddites don't fare well in the history books, and should someone come across an archived copy of this column in the future, I don't want to be viewed as a codger pining for the past while the world moves forward.

So there's really nothing left for me to do but to get an iPhone.

I've been trying to suppress my desire to possess one of these wondrous gadgets by convincing myself that they're destroying the fabric of society by segregating its users from the natural environment ... when the real reason is I don't want to pay the extra monthly charge for the data plan.

In deference to a simpler time, however, I pledge that my iPhone won't interfere with my responsibilities as citizen. I won't text while driving. I won't download songs during PTA meetings.

And if I ever run into you at McDonald's, rest assured, my eyesight is failing.

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