Jay Kennedy, you have cracked the Plato code, to put it in its popular terms. What does that actually mean?

It's very exciting, Phil. 2,500 years ago, Plato, a great philosopher, one of the first scientists, wrote some beautiful books that have inspired people for centuries. But the books are very mysterious.

In ancient times, people said they were written in a symbolic code. You had you read beneath the story to find Plato's true philosophy. Modern scholars all deny this. They don't see a code. But I happen to be an expert in ancient music and ancient mathematics. And indeed, I found out there is a code. If you know Greek music, you can see the patterns there and they lead you down to Plato's philosophy.

When did you actually discover this inroad into the mysteries of Plato?

It came partly by accident. I was teaching one course on Plato's philosophy. And then, in the history of science department, I was teaching another course on ancient music theory and mathematics. And I recognized, really surely by accident, that the ancient music gave me the key to the code.

And then there were some very exciting times. One thing came after another, after another. And I realized I discovered a whole layer underneath Plato's writings. We have about 2,000 pages. And now we know that all those 2,000 pages contain a second layer of meanings. One of my friends said, it's like discovering a new gospels written by Jesus Christ.

Why would he write like that? What would be the point?

Well there's a great debate about it. The short of it is there was religious persecution. The pioneers of the new science, the pioneers of the new philosophy, were seen as a threat to traditional religion.

We know that Plato's own teacher was executed for teaching philosophy. Plato escaped from Athens hid for 10 years-- we're not quite sure where, perhaps in Egypt, perhaps in Italy-- returned to Athens, began teaching again, but wrote in a secret code, so that those who were clever and advanced could find the truths he discovered, while most people would just receive an education from his works.
What sorts of things are being revealed by now understanding the underlying book?

Well I've written a whole book about this. The first thing to say is we now know that Plato was a member of the secret cult. 100 years before Plato, Pythagoras, the mathematician, had founded a secret cult with a whole lore of secret symbols. We don't know very much about it. None of their writings have survived.

But when we crack the code in Plato's works, we discover indeed, just as his students said, that he was a member of the secret cult of Pythagoras. That's important for two reasons. First is Pythagoras' cult invented our science. So one of the messages we find in Plato's works is he said that it wasn't Zeus up on the clouds. It wasn't the ancient Greek gods who controlled nature and determined our fate. It was mathematical laws that made the planets whirl around the sun. And this was a very dangerous idea that the world was governed by science, by mathematics, and not the gods.

So the first thing he wanted to communicate was our science. 2,000 years before the scientific revolution, he had the kernel of that idea. More surprisingly, perhaps, he wanted to convey that there was a way to combine his new science with traditional religion. And so part of the message in the works is a new way to combine science and religion. It might be useful for us today, where science and religion are often at war with each other. So was he really coming up the fact that he was a heretic?

Yes he was a heretic. Definitely. In short, the Greeks of his time were correct that the more science you do, the more philosophy you do, the more argument you do, the less powerful traditional theology becomes. So from their point of view, they're very right to persecute the new philosophers. On the other hand, those philosophers who wanted to base society upon democracy, upon human rights, upon debate and argument, they were creating our new world. It was a difficult and dangerous birth, but we're the beneficiaries of all that.

And where does the music fit in?

Indeed. The Pythagoreans, the followers of Pythagoras, didn't have our mathematical physics. The only example they had of a science controlled by mathematics, the only physics they had was music. They knew that the harmonies that make music sound good, were in fact the results of very simple mathematics. Two notes sound good, for example, when their frequencies have a one to two ratio.

Plato used the simple knowledge of mathematics, these simple ratios, to build a code into his works. So
for example, his musical scale had 12 regular notes. And the first thing you notice in his books is that if you go to 1/12, 2/12, 3/12, you find a regular pattern of symbols.

You only find those symbols if you know the musical scale. You know what you're looking for and that shows you the pattern. But once you have that, you understand how he’s using symbols, what they’re aiming at, what sort of patterns they’re building in, and that leads you to the labyrinth underneath his work.

Well, congratulations. How much of a reward is this for how many years work?

The particular insights came more than five years ago, but I've been in love with Plato for my whole adult life, I guess. He's a beautiful writer.

Jay Kennedy, thank you very much indeed.

[MUSIC PLAYING]