V

Plato and his Contemporaries

1. PLATO'S LIFE

As a young man I went through the same experience as many others; I thought that, the very moment I became my own master, I should devote myself to public affairs. And by the hazard of politics a chance of this offered itself to me… thirty rulers were set up with supreme powers. Some of these happened to be relatives and friends of mine, and they at once called me to join in this as my proper work… I paid great attention to what they should do. but I saw that in a little time their behavior had made the former constitution seem a golden age by comparison. For among other crimes, there was their treatment of Socrates… When I saw all this and much else like it, I was indignant and withdrew myself from contact with the evils of that time… I considered these events and the kind of men that were engaged in politics, and the existing laws and customs, and the more I considered and the older I grew, the more difficult did it seem to me to conduct the affairs of the state properly. For it was not possible to effect anything without the aid of friends and associates. And it was not easy to discover such men, even when they existed… The laws and customs, also, went on deteriorating to an extraordinary degree. I did not cease to investigate all possible means of improving these points, and indeed, of reforming the whole constitution, while as far as action went I went on awaiting a favorable opportunity. But in the end I came to the conclusion that all the cities of the present age are badly governed…

Plato’s Seventh Letter 324b-326a

Plato was born, either in Athens or on the island of Aegina off the Attic coast, in 424/3 BCE.¹ Pericles had died the year before in the plague, and Socrates was already forty-two years old. His parents, Ariston and Perictione, were distinctly upper-class. He was the youngest, with two brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus

¹So Debra Nails (2002), who provides the most sophisticated reconstruction of Plato’s life to date, and is to be consulted by anyone interested in the details of Plato’s biography. The date given by Appollodorus is 427. Some Ancient sources say 429. Our chief source for Plato’s life is his Seventh Letter, which is generally assumed to be authentic, but was written by someone near Plato not long after his death if not, and so bears some weight even in that case. We also have some information from later biographers, the best of whom is Diogenes Laertius. They all view Plato, like Pythagoras, as a divinity, and report more in the way of miracles than facts, but Diogenes at least names his sources, and so provides facts vouched for by near contemporaries of Plato himself. For an intelligent and thorough account of problems and sources, see Guthrie’s History IV (1975). For an attractive account of Plato’s life, both thorough and well written, see Field (1930).
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(who play a role in his Republic), and a sister, Potone, who was the mother of Speusippus, his successor in the Academy. Critias and Charmides, both members of the Thirty in the short-lived oligarchy of 404, were cousin and brother of Plato’s mother. While Plato was still a child his father died, and his mother remarried to her uncle, Pyrilampes, a man of political prominence who served as ambassador to Persia and other Asian powers. Pyrilampes’s son, Antiphon, figures in Plato’s Parmenides. Pyrilampes died by 413, and Adeimantus, at 19 years, became his mother’s guardian.

The rich and noble families that at first accepted Periclean democracy had gradually been driven into opposition by the unending financial burdens of the war. While Plato was coming to manhood, many near him became determined opponents of the democratic constitution, but he remained somewhat in favor of it, following, it appears, his parents’ lead. He refused to participate in the violent actions of many of his older relatives, and approved of the renewed democracy and its moderation toward its erstwhile opponents, despite its uncharacteristically harsh treatment of his friend and teacher, Socrates. He believed, perhaps, that democracy is the best form of government if one had to endure corruption and incompetence, since it best guards the citizens against the injustice of their fellow citizens in power.

Boyhood education in Greece emphasized physical training, a necessity if the boys were to serve well as soldiers. Moreover, athletic contests played an important diplomatic role—there would be a truce during important games, if any wars were on, allowing for negotiation, and games and festivals were established to memorialize, and help maintain, a new alliance. Plato took an interest in wrestling, and as a boy he represented Athens at the Isthmian games at Corinth. He may have been called ‘Plato’, ‘The Broad’, because of his broad shoulders, having been named ‘Aristocles’ by his parents. The arts also formed an important part of an upper-class education. It was a pastime in noble families to recite poetry at dinner parties, and anyone of even moderate culture could turn out passable verse. Plato displayed poetic gifts quite early, and intended a career as a dramatist before Socrates converted him to philosophy. With his education completed he would have served in the cavalry in the last five years of the Peloponnesian War, and probably saw action.

It is notable and odd that Plato never married. The tradition is that he was homosexual, and had endured the loss of someone he profoundly loved in his youth, but that would not have ruled out marriage, which was generally regarded as a duty to one’s family.

Plato almost certainly heard Socrates before twenty years of age. In 396, several years after Socrates’s

1Such marriages within the family were useful to preserve family estates intact.
execution, the young man, now 28, cautiously withdrew to the nearby city of Megara, where he stayed with a fellow philosopher, Euclides. We don’t know how long he was there, but at the latest he would have been summoned home in 395 to serve in the Corinthian War. Possibly Plato wrote the Socratic dialogues at Megara, and it seems reasonable to assume they reflected his own views at the time as well as Socrates’s. After this he may, according to later sources, have visited the mathematician Theodorus in Cyrene, a Greek trading city in Egypt, and perhaps the Socratic Aristippus, living in the same city. He then, about 385, traveled to Syracuse and Sicily, where he saw the Pythagorean Philolaus, and Archytas. It was probably in Sicily that he learned mathematics and Pythagoreanism, and left some of his Socratic views behind.

In particular, Plato developed his own views on matters of psychology, views less optimistic than Socrates’s about the possibility of bringing people to wisdom through rational discussion. After a series of preparatory dialogues, the *Meno, Protagoras, Gorgias, Lysis* and *Republic* I, in which he explored and criticized Socrates’s philosophy, Plato announced his new views in *Republic* II–X. He states there that only a few people can learn about the good through dialectic, and this only after long training, much of which is not intellectual training at all. He became convinced that there were multitudes of desires for different things, as opposed to a single desire for the good, many of them irrational inasmuch as they had no root in any belief about the good. He rejected, then, the Socratic view that people are always motivated by a rational desire for the good, following reason as well as they could in pursuit of a life of maximal pleasure, and he also rejected Socrates’s psychological egoism, for he thought one who loves the good rationally will seek the good wherever it is found, even when it is the good of others.

Disillusioned by his political experience, he came to think that the personalities of most were distorted by habitual attention to non-rational desires, until many no longer took any interest in rational desires at all.\(^3\) The dramatic settings of Plato’s dialogues in the days of the Democracy and Socrates often draws attention to the precarious political situation in Athens. The *Symposium* is set just months before the incident of the mutilation of the Herms, which led to the political downfall of Alcibiades, Phaedrus, and other chief figures in the dialogue. The *Laches*, in an arch discussion of Nicias’s confession that divination is a form of wisdom, foreshadows the general’s disastrous delay in removing from Sicily in response to an eclipse of the Moon, a delay that doomed the Athenian army to destruction. Those who enlist Socrates in the discussion in the *Republic* would soon be executed by the Thirty, and old Cephalus’s profitable armament factory would be confiscated

\(^3\)See Penner (1992).
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by their oligarchy. The freedom and rich life under the democracy is balanced by the instability and foolishness of the citizens, easily swayed by demagoguery and rhetoric. The natural and logical result is that Plato shows far less commitment to preserving others’ intellectual autonomy than Socrates. Socrates trusted people to work things out for themselves once they began to examine their own views, and thought it a bad idea to announce and argue for his own views, since that would tend to make people stop investigating the truth. Plato, in contrast, was convinced that many had become incapable of reasoning their way to a proper conception of the good—he did not even trust that they would seek the good as they themselves understood it in whatever moments of lucidity they might enjoy, dominated as they were by irrational desires. So he did not follow Socrates’s lead in helping people search out their own way to the truth. He advocated instead a political community that enforces the good life, restricting inquiry and trading in myth to keep the less rational citizens in line.4 His experience of the world gradually deepened his pessimism, and the Laws, written at the end of his life, is less hopeful than the Republic, and depends on the institutions of a state-run theistic religion, which is not to be subjected to intellectual criticism within his state, to motivate and train its citizens. Atheists are to be banished or executed, along with the artists who would produce poetry and drama, and even music, that does not reflect what is necessary to shape virtuous character and support the laws. He continued to believe that the soul was immortal, and that souls and the Good ruled the natural world, rejecting naturalistic accounts of the soul and the world, and provides in Laws X an argument for these points that we should probably assume was thought by him to be fundamentally sound. He expressed the same faith in a number of mythical accounts in the earlier dialogues, which formed the foundation for “Middle Platonism,” returning to the centrality of his religious views, after the impulse of his own dialectic had exhausted itself, and the “skepticism” of his immediate successors became unpopular with the new philosophical conservatism. Platonism, then, formed a natural introduction to Christian convictions concerning faith once that religion appeared on the scene, and Platonism underlies the development of the Christian “reconciliation” of faith and reason, while Laws X even provides a blueprint for the inquisition.

Plato’s passionate commitment to the immortality of the soul and an afterlife ruled by just gods is rooted, then, in his discouraging view of human psychology. Socrates is indifferent to the afterlife in the Apology, though he thinks, however it works out, that a good man is not allowed by the gods to suffer 4It may be that a similar economy was envisioned even within the virtuous man’s soul, so that we should tell false but beneficial tales to the less rational parts of our natures to persuade them to virtue.
misfortune. The introduction at the end of the *Gorgias* of the first of the many myths about the afterlife to appear in his dialogues is Plato’s confession of defeat for Socratic ethics—without the afterlife, he cannot defend Socrates’ view that it is never in our interest to harm others, or that the good man cannot suffer harm at the hands of a bad man. Perhaps he had become convinced that dialectic alone could not persuade even rational people to Socrates’s views. The arguments were too uncertain, but beyond this there was a psychological resistance to self-sacrificing views from the non-rational parts of the soul, which, being non-rational, could not be persuaded by reason alone. The myths of immortality appended to so many of his dialogues are certainly not intended to be true in detail—they instead may provide an example of the sort of thing to be told the less intellectually advanced, or to our own non-rational impulses, to convey the message of the dialogue. In a parallel way, Plato relies in his ideal state on beneficial lies about the supernatural to convince the less rationally oriented citizens to pursue the good. Here, rather than in any conviction that the truth cannot be communicated in more straightforward language, is where we should look for the likely explanation of Plato’s use of myth.\(^5\) The *Phaedrus* and perhaps the *Symposium* seem to license the stronger conclusion that Plato not only believed his myths to reflect “something like the truth” but to have thought that this truth can be known by a kind of rational intuition of the Forms even though it cannot be proved dialectically. It should be observed, though, that this intuition is a rational one, emerging from a thorough study of dialectic. If it occurs, it is not a replacement for but an outcome of dialectic and reason. But if Plato did hold it, he did not continue in this view. The later dialogues, especially the *Theaetetus*, provide clear and powerful arguments against the possibility of such an intuition.

After his return to Athens in 386, Plato founded the Academy, formalizing an association that had grown in the 80’s and earlier among a number of mathematicians and philosophers, including Theaetetus and Speusippus, son of Plato’s sister, Potone. He remained as head of the school for forty years until his death. (Just about this time, Aristotle was born. He joined the Academy at 17 years of age, in 367.) Perhaps he wished to establish a rival institution to the school of rhetoric set up by Isocrates four years earlier. He also began writing the Middle Dialogues, which express his new convictions in philosophy, beginning with the *Meno* (between 386 and 382), the *Protagoras*, and the *Gorgias*, transitional works that launched the revaluation of Socrates’s thought. The school, like most other public institutions, was formally a religious foundation. It was dedicated to the

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\(^5\) See Vlastos (1991). Vlastos thinks the use of myth and the distinction between esoteric and exoteric doctrine is one of the elements of his thought that Plato picked up from the Pythagoreans, who had reasons like Plato’s to be discouraged about the ordinary fellow’s capacity to grasp the truth and pursue the good.
worship of the Muses, and the Academy was their sacred grove. It was no doubt inspired by the Pythagorean associations in Italy. The students and masters lived and ate together, and a way of life was imposed on a student as long as he was in attendance, together with lectures and discussions in the sciences and philosophy. There was no formal degree or certification. The students, chiefly upper-class young men, would have attended for a few years in their teens, perhaps into their twenties, and then, unless they looked forward to the life of professional scholarship, they would have returned home to adult responsibilities. The education provided was supposed to be essentially political, more or less on the Pythagorean model, and Plato insisted, like the Pythagoreans, that a study of mathematics, science and philosophy was necessary as a preparation for politics. Isocrates, by contrast, thought rhetoric to be enough, though he professed to teach it along anti-Sophistic lines. A number of the Academy’s students went on to important political activity after leaving the school. The school seems to have acquired a reputation especially for legislation, and we have evidence of a number of consultations with its members by cities reforming their legal codes. Senior members of the school would have engaged in independent research, and enjoyed the freedom suitable to autonomous adults, while junior members, sent there for an education, would have been under the thumb of the Masters. The school was not Plato’s property, but that of the association of scholars. At least part of the point, of course, was to provide a living for scholars and scientists. Those who wished to patronize philosophy of the Platonic style could contribute money, and in return, get their sons educated. Research seems to have been chiefly in the mathematical disciplines, including astronomy, and in logic and philosophy, with an eye to ethics and politics. So noted did the school become that Eudoxus, who contrived the general theory of proportions, applicable both in arithmetic and geometry, that we see worked out in Euclid, moved his school of mathematics from Cyzicus to merge it with the Academy at Athens. The Pythagorean philosophers were all absorbed into the school. There was not much research in the empirical sciences in the Academy, and Aristotle’s interest in these areas was inherited, not from Plato, but from his father, who was a physician. The Academy looked West, toward the Italian Pythagoreans, not East towards Ionia, and we find the continuation of Ionian science rather in Democritus’s school, with its medical emphasis, in Abdera. Public lectures were given, probably as much to advertise the school’s wares as to spread enlightenment. Aristotle tells us that Plato’s public lecture on the good was ill adapted to its audience, which expected to get advice on how to get money or good health or
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happiness, but was inflicted instead with a discussion of geometry, the Definite and the Indefinite, and the like. But possibly Plato intended to attract only a certain sort of student, and his lecture was better adapted to his purposes than Aristotle recognized. Plato’s insistence that all his pupils study mathematics made the Academy an elitist institution for upper class students with time to acquire high culture, not the borderline trade school one finds with Isocrates.

Plato had given over any thought of a political career after Socrates’s execution, but he did do significant work in political philosophy, and felt committed to helping establish a genuinely virtuous state if an opportunity presented itself. On his first trip to Sicily, in 388, Plato had visited Syracuse, where he met Dion. He fell in love with him. Unlike Socrates, who archly pretended to an interest in boys, but was a solid middle-class heterosexual, Plato indulged in the homosexual interests of the upper classes. Dion was the brother-in-law of Dionysius I, the ruler of Syracuse, and an important member of his court. In 367, Dionysius I died, and his son, who was talented and wanted to be well thought of, was persuaded by Dion to invite Plato to Syracuse so the philosopher could educate him. Plato reluctantly agreed, out of friendship and a certain shame at not being willing to take action on his ideals when the opportunity offered. The effort to educate the young man was a disaster. Dionysius developed a real affection for Plato, and tried jealously to displace Dion in his regard, but he was unwilling to reform his life or devote any effort to study. Finally he allowed Plato to return home to Athens with Dion in 365. He sent Dion into exile, the usual way of handling politically dangerous men, and seized his property as a surety for circumspect behavior abroad. Four years later, in 361, Dionysius invited Plato (but not Dion) to visit Syracuse once more, and Plato, this time very reluctantly, agreed, for even Archytas claimed that the young man was now eager to learn philosophy, and Dion urged him to go. This trip was even more a failure, but, Plato says, “at least I got away with my life.” Dionysius was quite sure he had learned everything of importance already from other members of his court, and would listen to

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6 Or so it is reported by Aristotle’s pupil, Aristoxenus, in Elements of Harmony. See Guthrie (1978) Vol. IV, 424 for details. Presumably this lecture would have been given late in Plato’s career, and reflected the views of the Philebus.

7 A later story, probably false, relates that Plato’s conversion of Dion to philosophy displeased Dionysius, who liked loose, luxurious ways, and so he sold Plato into slavery, and the philosopher had to be ransomed by Cyrenean friends. It is possible that Plato was seized by Aeginetan pirates on his trip home, and sold, for Aegina was at war with Athens from 387 to 384, raiding Athenian commerce. If that is the truth of the matter, Dionysius presumably had nothing to do with it. But it is most likely that he was never sold into slavery at all, since there is no mention of this in the Seventh Letter. Archytas was powerful and influential, virtually ruling Tarentum, and had recommended Plato’s visit, and he no doubt assured that, if he must leave, Plato would get away safely.

8 One of these was the Socratic hedonist, Aristippus, we are told, and Diogenes Laertius speaks of a number of clever verbal exchanges between him and Plato.
no correction or criticism. No match for the courtiers, Plato felt compelled to leave when Dionysius started illegally selling off Dion’s property, and returned to the Academy for the last thirteen years of his life. Dion, without Plato’s active participation, organized a force to attack the city, and was at first successful in his coup, but Callippus, perhaps a fellow student in the Academy, though Plato denies it, assassinated him four years after he had set out from Athens. Plato’s skepticism about the rationality of his fellows, and his dislike for politics, deepened with these events.9

After this, remaining at the Academy, Plato continued to write very sophisticated philosophy, and was working on the Laws when he died in 347. His will suggests he did not have much money.

2. PLATO’S WORKS

For every real being, there are three things that are necessary if knowledge of it is to be acquired: first, the name; second, the definition; third, the image; knowledge comes fourth, and in the fifth place we must put the object itself, the knowable and truly real being. . . There is something called a circle, . . . there is its definition, composed of nouns and verbs, “The figure whose extremities are everywhere equally distant from its center” . . . Third is what we draw or rub out, what is turned or destroyed; but the circle itself to which these all refer remains unaffected, because it is different from them. In the fourth place are scientific knowledge, reason, and right opinion . . . By the repeated use of all these instruments, ascending and descending to each in turn, it is barely possible for knowledge to be engendered of an object naturally good, in a man naturally good . . . [but] neither quickness or learning nor a good memory can make a man see when his nature is not akin to the object. . . Only when all of these things—names, definitions, and visual and other perceptions—have been rubbed against one another and tested, pupil and teacher asking and answering questions in good will and without envy—only then, when reason and knowledge are at the very extremity of human effort, can they illuminate the nature of any object. For this reason anyone who is seriously studying high matters will be the last to

9The story just presented is the majority view, based in Plato’s letters, but note should be taken of the work of Gilbert Ryle (1966), who argued that the letters of Plato concerning Syracuse were an early forgery produced by the party of Dion. Ryle suggests that Plato was in fact invited to Syracuse by Dionysius II on both occasions as part of a general policy of putting up intellectual luminaries at his court. Both Aristippus and Aeschines were present there in 367, and Isocrates, Plato’s chief rival, seems to have turned down an invitation to visit Sicily at about that time. If Ryle is right, both Dionysius I and Dionysius II were patrons of philosophy, and there was no special relation between either of them, or Dion, for that matter, and Plato. Ryle’s views have not gained any following to speak of, but they seem possible. If the letters (other than Letters I and II) are forgeries, they are certainly both early and very artful. In later times it was common to forge letters by famous men in order to sell them to the great libraries, but scholars agree at least that Plato’s letters cannot possibly have been written long after Plato himself. They presumably would have been intended to support the anti-Dionysian party at Syracuse.
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write about them and thus expose his thought to the envy and criticism of men. . . Whenever we see a book. . . we can be sure that if the author is really serious this book does not contain his best thoughts.


[Socrates:] Well, son of Ariston, your city might now be said to be established. The next step is to get an adequate light somewhere, and to call upon your brother as well as Polemarchus and the others, and so to look inside it and see where the justice and injustice might be in it . . . You’re talking nonsense, Glaucon said. You promised to look for them yourself because you said it was impious not to come to the rescue of justice in every way you could.

Plato, *Republic* IV 427c.

Plato’s works have been exceptionally well preserved—probably the Academy had a library in which they, and the other works of the members of the school, held a central place. The preservation of a book in Ancient times depended on its being frequently and accurately copied, since, especially if it was on papyrus instead of the far more expensive parchment, no one copy could be expected to last very long, and, in the absence of printing, only manuscript copies could be made. A book that became unpopular enough so that copies were no longer made could be expected to disappear entirely in a few hundred years. One of the more important activities of a library was the copying of the books as they deteriorated, and the placement of additional exemplars elsewhere in case its copies should be destroyed.

We have already examined the substance of Plato’s earlier writings (before the first trip to Syracuse) in our discussion of Socrates. The Socratic dialogues were more likely than not all written after Socrates’s death, which led Plato to take up philosophy as his life work. It is generally assumed that he began in

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10Most scholars now agree on the basics of the order of composition of Plato’s works. The received view has evolved from a consideration of cross references within the works themselves, from important stylometric considerations (for which see the summary of stylometric research in Brandwood (1992) and Irwin (1995) Section 6), and from a consideration of the philosophical content of the dialogues. It is important, also, that a coherent picture of Plato’s philosophical development, which meshes with what we know of the events of his life, can be developed given the order of composition of the dialogues suggested by stylometry and cross references.

11Diogenes Laërtius 3.35 reports that Socrates heard Plato reading the *Lysis*, and commented on the pack of lies he was producing about him, but this is now considered apocryphal. George Grote, in *Plato and the Other Companions of Socrates* (1875) first opposed the scholarly consensus that Plato began writing his dialogues during Socrates’s life, arguing from the *Seventh Letter* in particular that Plato only became disillusioned with the political life, turning to philosophy, with Socrates’s death, and that it would have been a considerable liberty for Plato to make Socrates a character in such works while his master was still alive. See Guthrie
agreement with his teacher on all important issues, and to present the truth and present the views of Socrates would have been the same thing for him at first. The early dialogues are put in dramatic form, for they are intended to present Socrates himself and his elenchic method as well as his ideas. Even the Gorgias, Protagoras and Meno, in which Socrates, for the first time, is given a good deal of trouble by his interlocutors, and sometimes forced to resort to questionable arguments, at best hint at a new Platonic approach, and they seem intended to do the best that can be done by Socrates, strongly indicating the necessity for something more than further exploration of Socratic views, before Plato argues for something new and more adequate in his later works. Probably the Lysis should also be placed in this group, as a dialogue suggesting the limitations of Socratic ethics in dealing with love, in preparation for the Symposium. His intention may have been pious, a kind of respectful goodbye to his master, but it was also propaedeutic—Plato wanted to make it clear that Socrates’s views had serious problems, and required rethinking, leading his reader along the same road he himself had followed. In these transitional dialogues, especially the Meno, Plato suddenly shows an interest in subjects other than ethics, begins to display a new knowledge of mathematics, and to abandon elements of the Socratic method. It seems he has met up with Philolaus and Archytas in Syracuse, and his encounter with Pythagoreanism gives his thought a new direction. Nonetheless, he continues to write Socratic dialogues, even though they present his own views, not those of Socrates, any more. The Socratic dialogue was already established as a literary form, though we don’t know how it arose. Plato seems, in any case, to present what he thinks Socrates would have agreed to if he had thought things through a little more, and is often careful to put the new doctrines he introduces at arm’s length from Socrates, making them something Socrates reports having heard somewhere, rather than presenting them as his own views. Certainly Plato took Socratic views to have their own life, and continue after Socrates, whom he begins to take as nothing more than a personification of dialectic, and he thought Socrates would have identified with the continued career of dialectic

(1975) 54-56. The first work was perhaps the Apology, written in response to the “Accusation of Socrates” by the Sophist Polycrates (ca. 440-370), in which Anytus is the speaker. Polycrates seems to have made a career of writing speeches praising and condemning unlikely candidates, and wrote encomia of Paris, Clytemnestra, mice and salt.

If he began with some serious doubt about Socratic principles, it seems likely there would be some sign of this in his writings, but we have none, and the first dialogues would be seriously misleading, and disrespectful to Socrates, if they presented as his own views that Socrates in fact rejected. Later dialogues could be freer as long as enough information was provided so that the intelligent reader could see their intention. The correspondence between the views attributed to Socrates in Xenophon’s and Plato’s dialogues also help the case, though, of course, it may be that Xenophon depends on Plato, despite his protestation that he researched Socrates’s reported conversations himself. Xenophon, given his extensive absences from Athens, could not have known Socrates well, and reported very few conversations as something he had himself heard. He also did not profess himself to be a philosopher, or enjoy the subtlety of a philosopher’s mind. He was much more likely than Plato, then, to have represented his own views as Socrates’s.
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itself, as representing his truest intentions. The Republic, a much longer work dealing with ethics, politics, epistemology and metaphysics, provided Plato’s manifesto of his own views. Together with the other Middle Dialogues, including the Phaedo on the forms and the immortality of the soul, the Symposium on the nature of altruism and love and its place in the good life, the Cratylus, a defense of Realism against the Sophists, and the Phaedrus, which returns to the consideration of the forms and their relation to the soul, these dialogues present a consistent and comprehensive philosophical world view. They are marked by a shift in the method followed by the ‘Socrates’ who is their chief speaker. ‘Socrates’ had relied entirely on exploratory refutations in the early Socratic dialogues, and then softened his approach, providing his own suggestions for examination, in the later Socratic dialogues. In the Middle Dialogues his own views come to dominate the discussion, and he expects his interlocutor only to verify his logic and confirm his suggestions. He is unwilling to argue from assumptions his interlocutors reject, but he suggests answers himself to many criticisms of his views in an attempt to get their agreement. The interlocutor is relieved of the duty of coming up with his own theories to answer the questions put. The transition is marked at the end of Republic I. There, after his elenctic discussion with Thrasymachus, ‘Socrates’ laments the inconclusiveness of his results, and is ready to leave, when Plato’s brothers insist that he start over and do the job properly. He remains, and abandons the elenches for a systematic, argued development of his own views in the remaining nine books. Plato returned, perhaps around 365 BCE, to older methods in the Later Dialogues, beginning with the Theaetetus, Parmenides and Sophist, which criticize the metaphysics and epistemology of the Middle Dialogues, and sometimes leave it to the reader to puzzle out how the criticisms are to be answered—but it should be observed that these works are clearly directed to experts in philosophy, not ordinary students. Moreover, Plato does not seem to abandon his theory of the Forms as paradigms resembled by their participants, though he digs more deeply into the complexities of his theory. Indeed, genuine experts in philosophy, Socrates himself, and advanced students, serve as interlocutors here. Plato no doubt anticipated his intended audience would be up to the challenge and profit

13The evidence of Aristotle is of first importance in separating Plato from Socrates. The chief points are Plato’s “separation” of the Forms, which Socrates did not separate from particulars (Metaphysics I 6, 987b1–10; XIII 9, 1086b2–5), Plato’s un-Socratic interest in natural matters and the philosophy of the Italians (i.e. the Pythagoreans), whom he followed in many things, as well as his adoption of the “Heraclitean” belief that sensibles are always changing and are thus unknowable, which led him to postulate the separation of Forms (Metaphysics I 6, 987a29–b8), the shift from Socratic elenctic to the more positive Platonic dialectical method (On Sophistical Refutations 183b7–8), and Plato’s abandonment of Socratic Intellectualism, attending to the irrational part of the soul (Magna Moralia I 11, 1182a15-28). See W.D. Ross, Aristotle’s Metaphysics vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), xxxiii-xliv.

14Or perhaps earlier at Gorgias 519de, where Socrates confesses he has fallen into making long speeches precisely because Callicles is unwilling to answer. Evidently, all along he had been able to make such speeches, he confesses. Exposition is needed when someone stubbornly refuses to investigate the matter himself, even with the guidance and assistance of an expert.
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from it. In these later dialogues most of the puzzles are resolved, sometimes quite explicitly, but then a particularly challenging puzzle, marked off as more difficult, will be presented and left for the reader to handle. It is the same procedure a modern mathematical text follows in proposing exercises for the reader to consolidate her grasp of what has been exposted. Following these is the Statesman, a companion piece to the Sophist on politics, and then the Timaeus summarizing Plato’s views in natural science, with little or no criticism, coming closer to the Pre-Socratic way of doing things than anything else he wrote, and quite explicitly affirming the theory of Forms. Then came the Critias, intended to follow the Timaeus and deal with political matters, but left incomplete, like the Statesman. The Philebus draws on the theory of Forms to present a sophisticated discussion of pleasure and its relation to reason. At the end of his life Plato was working on the Laws, a long piece like the Republic, laying out in some detail proposed laws for the best attainable state.

The Later Dialogues consider problems with the views of the Middle Dialogues, problems which may have been raised by Plato’s own students and colleagues in the Academy, though Plato has his own analysis of just where the problems lie and how to handle them. These problems introduce a careful examination of the notion of participation in a Form, and consideration how the Forms are known, and what metaphysical apparatus needs to be introduced to explain the possibility of their being known. There may have been a number of different theories of the Forms current in the Academy at this point, and Plato is quite critical of at least one of them, but there is no reason to suppose he ever abandoned, or seriously altered, his own theory. Aristotle did abandon the theory entirely, of course, moving to a more empiricist position, but his metaphysics, as well as his criticism of the theory of Forms, is rooted firmly in the thought of Plato’s Later Dialogues, nonetheless, and cannot be properly understood without them.

Some scholars have made a great deal of the dialogue form in Plato, claiming that he held to some secret oral doctrine that the dialogues only hint at. This is plain, they say, from Plato’s remarks on the limitations of the written word in conveying the writer’s thought in the Seventh and Second Letters, and the reference to an ‘unwritten tradition’ in the Phaedrus, which intends to suggest that Plato taught some things to his disciples that he never wrote down. Much of this material is a straightforward description of the shortcomings of written communication. The written word cannot clear up confusions the reader may have, or answer questions, it cannot defend itself against new objections, and it often comes to be read by people

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who have no chance of understanding it. These references do also suggest, I think, that dialectic leads, perhaps through a sort of direct vision of the Forms, in particular the Form of the Good, to our seeing that some things are true which are not provable through dialectic. But these things can be stated well enough (the soul is immortal, for instance and there is a God). Perhaps one sees something that cannot be said when one sees the Form of the Good, say, and responds to it through love and devotion to the Good, but, sensibly enough, Plato does not to try to say it, but, at most, uses myth to suggest what the experience of this truth is like. Moreover, if these truths cannot be proved through dialectic, they cannot be discovered without dialectic either, according to Plato—one must pursue dialectic to the end and appreciate its limitations in some way to discover them. Further, Aristotle’s discussion of Plato does not much support the notion that there were unwritten doctrines. It does introduce late doctrines about the role of mathematical entities as intermediaries between Forms and sensibles, and about the Great and the Small as the elements of the Forms on the material side, and Unity on the side of substantial form, but it is not at all clear that these do not come from the Philebus, and even if they do not, it seems more likely that Plato simply had not yet written them down when he died, than it is that he thought them somehow incommunicable.

It is clear that Plato does not think that the best way to instruct is simply to say straight out what he thinks. He forces us to work through problems, and often refrains from stating their solutions, being satisfied with hints and sufficient material for an intelligent (or maybe absolutely brilliant) student to work it out on his own. No doubt the working out of the puzzles is harder for us than it was for his students, who enjoyed conversation with him, but it is not impossible. In particular, for a solution to a problem to be assigned to Plato, we really must find the materials for that solution at hand in the dialogue. At no point does the difficulty of the task require us to assign views to Plato for which there is no support in the written sources. As for the dramatic side of the dialogues, its bearing on their interpretation can be important, but it instructs us how to take the explicit argumentation, which must be understood and appreciated before the point of the drama can

16Phaedrus 275c-e.

17If they also endorse that claim, the endorsement was withdrawn in later dialogues. Plato did hold in the Theaetetus, for instance, that the higher Forms could not be captured in definitions, as we shall see. This is one source of his remarks concerning the inadequacy of writing to teach philosophy, but it provides no support for the notion that he taught unwritten doctrines, or that he thought some important views entirely inexpressible in language, or even that he thought the Forms to be knowable by direct intuition. It does suggest that one must participate in philosophical dialectic, working out the consequences and problems of various views, for a long time before one begins to know anything.

None of this means that the dramatic side of the dialogues is to be ignored in the attempt to understand them. These are not treatises, and understanding the personal dynamics and hidden motives behind the moves made in these discussions is important to assessing their meaning. Above all, we need to notice when irony is present, and the ways in which the characters reveal themselves unwittingly. We are told a great deal about how different people respond to philosophy and its challenges through the “framework story” in each dialogue, and this is far from an unimportant matter. Plato is a great poet, and there is nothing accidental in great poetry, but beyond that, he is trying to reproduce the rhythms of real interaction between student and teacher, and the character of the student, and the teacher, are very much relevant to understanding their communication, particularly when irony is involved. The drama of ironic misunderstanding is always present in Plato’s work.¹⁹

My focus below will be on Plato’s arguments, then, but I do not intend to ignore the literary and dramatic aspects of the dialogues, for these often tell us how to take the arguments, and provide running commentary on how Plato expected they would be received by his fellows.²⁰

3. PLATO’S CRITICISM OF SOCRATIC ETHICS

They say that to do injustice is naturally good and to suffer injustice bad, but that the badness of suffering it so far exceeds the goodness of doing it that those who have done and suffered injustice and tasted both, but who lack the power to do it and avoid suffering it, decide that it is profitable to come to an agreement with each other neither to do injustice nor to suffer it. As a result, they begin to make laws and covenants, and what the law commands they call lawful and just. This, they say, is the origin and essence of justice. It is intermediate between the best and the worst. The best is to do injustice without paying the penalty, the worst is to suffer it without being able to take revenge. Justice is a mean between these two extremes.

Plato, Republic II, 358e–359b.²¹

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¹⁹A particularly fine analysis of the poetic side of Plato’s Republic, centering on his use of Homer and Hesiod there and the characters of Glaucon and Adeimantus, is to be found in David K. O’Connor’s “Rewriting the Poets in Plato’s Characters,” in Ferrari (2007) 55-89.


²¹Translated Grube, revised C.C.C. Reeve.
Plato’s presentation of his own ethical views began with the criticism of Socrates. Plato accepted Socrates’s view that the fundamental goal of a human being is happiness or doing well, and he agreed that virtue must, therefore, lead to happiness, and, indeed, that without virtue one cannot be happy. But he rejected the Socratic view that virtue is knowledge. Virtue is more than knowledge, for it involves a propensity to action rooted in rational desires, and non-rational desires are in charge in many human beings. Those with the knowledge, but the wrong desires, still lack virtue. So those who are virtuous and those who are not do not agree on the ultimate end. In particular, not everyone seeks, ultimately, a maximally pleasurable life, and this does not, as Socrates thinks, provide a definition of the good life everyone would accept. Moreover, Plato thought, even if everyone did seek a maximally pleasurable life, Socrates fails to provide good reason to think the world is a place where that goal is best met by being just, even though he is in fact right about this. The Socratic account of virtue and Socratic arguments for its rationality must be abandoned, then, and Plato presents new arguments to establish that virtue is rational and vice irrational.

The rationality of justice was the most difficult point. Somewhat indirectly in the Gorgias, and pretty openly in Republic I and II, Plato argued that the Socratic defense of justice won’t work. In Republic II-IV the justice found in a person, the soul’s health, was then argued to be good in itself, and it was proposed that one who has this inner characteristic will act justly outwardly towards others, because inner justice involves the love of Justice Itself for its own sake, and so the desire to see it exemplified everywhere, in other individuals and in communities, and certainly in one’s own actions. The same is true for the love of the Good Itself, so that a person who has a rational love for the good seeks others’ good. A just man does not act for the sake of his own benefit alone. In particular, he does not aim to benefit by getting others to sign onto the social contract. Rather, a good and just person views it as a good thing, to be sought for its own sake, that others should be just and enjoy the good. But with all this, Plato still argued in addition that it is, as a matter of fact, also good for the agent to pursue justice for its own sake, since a person cannot be happy who does not know the good, and

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22 In the Protagoras and Gorgias, and then in the first two books of the Republic, he laid out Socratic views, probably filling in gaps as plausibly as he could, and raised difficulties with them. In the rest of the Republic, Plato introduced his own views, decisively different, though clearly developed in reaction to his teacher’s, in answer to those difficulties. The view I take here is that of Irwin (1977) and (1995), whom I follow in many details.

23 Symposium 204e–205a, Euthydemus 278e–282d. The word for “happiness” or “living well” here is eudaimonia, perhaps best rendered as “good fortune,” and the view that happiness is the basic goal is called “eudaimonism.” Alternative views are possible, and, upon reflection, even plausible. For instance, perhaps human beings seek above all, or at least independently, power and security, or self-esteem, or some more complex philosophical aim, such as self-expression.

24 In the later books of the Republic.
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so value the good of others for its own sake, so that she never willingly harms others, and such a person has an inner peace and harmony which it is never worth abandoning for the sake of external benefits. We will begin by looking more closely at Plato’s criticism of Socratic views, and lay out his positive views more fully in the next section.

Let us begin with the Gorgias. The theme of the dialogue is the nature of rhetoric, an important matter, in the view of Gorgias, who opens the discussion, since he views rhetoric as a master art that rules all the others and provides the key to success in life—it is that knowledge of the good that Socrates would call virtue. Asked to define it, he identifies rhetoric as an art dealing in words, as opposed to a practical art aiming at results such as pastry or health. So he makes rhetoric a theoretical science. Socrates presses him to complete the identification, asking what rhetoric’s subject matter is, that is, which theoretical science it is. He is told it deals with words that produce persuasion, but this is true of both theoretical and practical arts in general—doctors, for instance, endeavor to persuade fellow experts of their theories, and exhort patients to follow their regimens. So Gorgias suggests that rhetoric concerns the persuasion of judges and decision makers in courts and assemblies, about matters of justice and injustice. Like Plato himself in the Republic, Gorgias assumes the good life can only be lived by a human being within a community, and so virtue is ultimately political. But unlike Plato, he thinks political virtue to be a matter of persuasive power, the most important of the competitive skills needed to live in a community. One has a duty not to misuse this skill, but we ought not complain about the teacher of rhetoric if sometimes people do misuse it, any more than we condemn teachers of medicine if some physician misuses his medical knowledge.

But is someone who is persuasive thereby likely to lead a good life? Rhetoric does not seem persuasive unless it is employed on crowds of inexpert people. It does not impart knowledge of justice and injustice, but only possibly erroneous conviction. Gorgias is unimpressed by the point. He agrees when pressed that rhetoric needs to be supplemented with knowledge what is good, but he sees the root of virtue nonetheless in power, not knowledge, for the wise use of power, he thinks, is much less difficult of acquisition than power itself. Most people will be just enough already (because justice is a matter of following the standards agreed to within the community?), but if someone has not learned those standards Gorgias thinks it will be easy enough for any teacher of rhetoric to teach that, too, on the side.25

25Gorgias 460a. In Socrates’s response to Tisias at Phaedrus 272de, Plato suggests that what is plausible is what is eikos, and this is what the group addressed by the orator believes. Given that eikos means “resembling the truth,” this suggests that it is because of its resemblance to the truth (in some relevant respect) that the plausible is plausible to people. Now an orator needs to know the
Perhaps this is disingenuous, though if so it is the only sign of dishonesty from Gorgias in the dialogue, but he may be unable quite to bear the portrait of rhetoric that is emerging, making it nothing more than a competitive skill. The community surely needs not only effective orators, but the right standards, which will have to be provided by genuinely wise men, and the young men learning rhetoric will have to be willing to follow the wise man’s advice how to use his skill. But it is not clear that Gorgias can in fact pass his own wise opinions about justice on to his students—why would they take any interest in those opinions, if it is the power given by rhetorical skill they seek, that is, their own power and welfare, which they think they understand already, and not the good of the community? Gorgias thinks this wisdom commonplace though, allowing that likely his students do have it already, if they are well brought up in good families. The fellow in need of instruction would be exceptional, not the rule. It is as though a mathematics teacher in a modern school were to encounter a student with no respect for the law. He should address the problem if he can, for the sake of the student, to be a good teacher, but it has nothing to do with the mathematics he is teaching.

Gorgias’s uncomfortable dismissal of what he takes to be a side issue here gives Socrates a chance to charge him with a contradiction rooted in a paradoxical Socratic view, that no one ever willingly does what is wrong. Gorgias has granted (if only by the way) that it is necessary to know what is just to be an orator, and Socrates argues that one who knew this would in fact be just, and so, in virtue of being an orator, would act justly. It was absurd to suggest, as Gorgias had, that the teacher of rhetoric, and rhetoric itself, is not to be criticized if a particular orator acted unjustly, for no skilled orator would ever act unjustly. Of course, the truth in order to know what resembles it (in the relevant respect), so that he can know what is likely. (More than a hint of the theory of Forms is present here.) This knowledge would enable the orator to hit on new arguments that his audience would find plausible, rather than merely relying on what everyone already thinks explicitly, a skill that an orator might well want to lay claim to. This is rather a different account than the Gorgias seems to give of the orator’s skill, making it look much less like a matter of well-meaning deception, but it still means that an orator needs to know the truth to practice his profession. Perhaps, though, he need only know it implicitly, so that he reliably recognizes what resembles the truth, rather than being able to lay out the truth exactly and explicitly. Even so, it would then seem that philosophy, aiming at explicit knowledge of the Form of the Just, say, would at least enjoy a certain right of judgment and correction over the opinions of the orator. All this is pointed out in Cooper (1985).

Or perhaps not—I have heard very similar remarks from Business Professors concerning ethics, for instance. People are ethical enough, and if it is necessary to teach them about ethics, any decent human being (and so virtually any business professor) can do that. It just happens by the way while one teaches business, and requires no special place in the curriculum, much less its own expert to teach it. This is common sense, and if it is wrong, it is not necessarily dishonest, for to many it seems obviously right.

One might well wonder how that follows, but we have seen that it would on Socrates’s Intellectualist account of virtue. It is not defended in the Gorgias, which clearly presupposes a knowledge of Socratic views. That Socrates makes this move surely indicates that Plato is making Socrates argue from his own presuppositions here—he is not a mere mouthpiece for Platonic views.

Gorgias 460a–461b.
suggestion is not absurd, and Gorgias knows it is not, so he should confess an orator does not know what is just, nor is he just in virtue of his art.

Polus, a student of Gorgias, and a physician, now takes over the discussion, and points out quite astutely that Socrates has shamed Gorgias into the crucial admission that he himself would have to teach justice to the student if he did not know it. Gorgias should have, shamelessly, insisted on what is so, that rhetoric does not involve justice, but justice is not needed to live a good life, so there is no need to teach it. He then demands that Socrates provide his own definition of rhetoric. Rhetoric is not, Socrates responds, an art of any sort at all, practical or theoretical, but rather a skill (empeiria) that can be taught, imitating the art of justice in order to produce pleasure. Polus is not particularly pleased by this, but he did insist on brutal honesty, and he can still point out that the skill in question imparts considerable power to the one who has it. Socrates replies that an orator may, using his skill, do what seems best for himself, but not what is best for himself, for that is the subject of a different art. Rhetoric has no way by itself to tell what is in fact best. So, if one insists, as Polus does (and Socrates does not!), that power, being a virtue, is always good for its possessor, then rhetoric provides no power to its possessor. Always, when we act from real power, we will to get what is good for us, and the orator, in virtue of his skill, only gets, or seeks, what appears good to him. Real power, whatever its source, is a virtue, and so it involves knowledge of the good.

Polus points out that one with the power given by rhetoric can take what he wants with impunity, whether it is his or not—surely this means that this power is beneficial to its agent. Socrates responds that to do wrong is a worse thing than to suffer wrong, and so, he argues, unjust acts are shameful and cannot be fine or noble. So might unjust acts, though shameful, be useful for the agent and so good, as just acts may be

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29 Gorgias 461b–466a. The idea is that it involves certain routines that produce pleasure, but no understanding why the routines should work. A skill is imparted when rhetoric is learned, but no knowledge. Rhetoric is to politics, as cookery is to medicine, cosmetics is to gymnastics, and sophistic is to justice. Each is an imitation of a genuine art, for the sake of producing pleasure, not the good. Socrates claims that Polus himself makes this distinction, holding that a craft develops out of skill, empeiria, with the addition, presumably, of theoretical knowledge, in a book of his. Cf. Aristotle, Metaphysics I 1.

30 Gorgias 466b.

31 At 467c this is strengthened to the claim, ‘when we act, we will only what is good for us,’ which is needed by the argument. Again, this is a Socratic assumption that Plato denies in the Republic.

32 Gorgias 468e. So the assumption is that if one gets what he wants, he gets the good.

33 He assumes that it must be worse either because of its results, so that it is less useful (ophelimos), or because it is worse considered in itself, and so is less a fine or noble (kalos) and more a shameful (aischros) thing.
bad for the agent even though they are always fine and noble? Polus grants this, and even grants that unjust acts are shameful even though one ought to do them—he is not about to be shamed into inconsistency, like Gorgias, by rhetorical appeals to popular morality. But how is it an act can be a fine one, and shameful at the same time? Something other than mere appearances must establish that it is fine. Polus, no doubt, would do best to claim that just acts are not really fine, but only supposed to be so by the ignorant, but he claims instead that fine (kalos) things, that is, things deserving of being valued, are always (objectively) useful, and so, given his conception of the good produced by useful things, always pleasure-producing. Socrates is then able to argue that, given how often they are punished, unjust acts in fact produce pain more often than not, and so are not always fine, after all. The point seems to be that if we make usefulness to the agent the criterion for an action’s worth, then neither just nor unjust actions are uniformly good. Justice and injustice, it seems, have nothing to do with the issue what we ought to do. Polus is unhappy granting that, of course, for he wants to claim that unjust actions are better than just ones, in general at least.

But he doesn’t try to defend that suggestion, but rather a weaker one, that it is a good thing, and rationally to be valued, to gain pleasures through injustice (through shameful acts) as long as one escapes punishment. So injustice is at least good some of the time. Indeed, the original notion that unjust acts are fine rested on the notion that their performance constituted a competitive victory, and, of course, one only wins who escapes punishment for the unjust act. So Socrates now argues it is better to be punished when one is unjust than to escape punishment, even though it might seem it is both more shameful and more painful to be punished. If there is a kind of act that is fine, to be admired and valued for itself, then the suffering of such an action, as well as the doing of it, must be a fine thing. It is, after all, the same act that is done and is suffered, so it cannot be of itself both fine and shameful. More precisely, it is a fine and noble thing taken in itself that the unjust should suffer punishment, and so it will be fine as it is viewed by both the judge and the agent. So a just punishment must be fine for the judge who imposes it and the criminal who suffers it, equally.

Surely one can challenge this. Say there is a competitive act that results somehow in victory for one person, and defeat for the other. It is to be admired as an act performed by the victor, yielding victory, but it is shameful for the one who suffers defeat. Is such an act fine, or shameful, in itself? Probably we should say it is neither, but has no character at all in itself. It is only in the way it reflects on the various people involved that

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34This is, of course, a very questionable premise. Surely some things are fine for their own sakes, not because of their use.

35Gorgias 474c-477a.
it is noble and fine, or shameful. This would concern Socrates, since he is interested in the quality that makes an action objectively good—at the very least he wants to know what makes it objectively good for a given person—and this suggests that its being fine or shameful has no bearing on its objective goodness. Now Polus also seeks the objective good, and so he takes it that an action must be fine or shameful in itself to be good or bad, not simply by reflecting credit or shame on the people involved in it. He is inclined to say that an act beneficial to its agent is fine, and admirable even for a person harmed by it, for the loser is obliged to admire his opponent’s skill. The one incapable of winning envies the victor, for he thinks he has something fine in his victory. So he ought to agree that, just as a fine stroke that gains victory is to be admired even by the loser, so a fine punishment by which a punisher puts right the crime is to be admired even by the one punished. Socrates has not tricked him—he has only followed out the consequences of his own assumptions.

But Socrates does have to trick him to establish the supposed contradiction in his views. Once Polus grants that suffering punishment is a fine thing for the unjust, Socrates goes on to consider how this can be so, and observes that doctors (as Heraclitus had observed) seem to inflict damage on the sick, cutting and cauterizing, and depriving people of pleasure with their regimens, but this is all accounted as doing good for them, since it reestablishes or improves their health. So the health of the soul must be a good thing that is improved or established through punishment.\(^{36}\) Rhetoric, then, is of little use, for people use it chiefly to avoid punishment that is due them, and that does them positive harm. Now all that has been shown by Socrates at this point is that a just punishment is a fine thing, and much to be admired, even from the viewpoint of the one punished. But he might admire it only because it exhibits so well the power and competence of the punisher, surely it has not been shown that just punishment is beneficial to the one punished! One may grant that one’s opponent has won a fine victory even if it is a disaster and a disgrace for oneself to have lost. True, Polus has argued that to be fine is to produce benefits, but it is to produce benefits for the agent. So the judge must be benefitted in a fine, just punishment, but by no means does it follow that the punished must benefit. If the punished is not benefitted, but harmed, by such a fine act, it is open to Polus to go on and point out that just as there are certain shameful acts one rationally ought to perform, so there are certain fine acts others might

\(^{36}\)Is this because health of soul is necessary for pleasure? Such a consideration occurs in the Protagoras, which does not yet have the Forms in view, but not here, perhaps. Indeed, in the discussion of pleasure at the end it is suggested that wise and unwise men experience pretty much the same amount of pleasure and pain, so that wisdom does not increase pleasure (Gorgias 497e–499a). When it is then objected that some pleasures are better than others, those turn out to be the pleasures that foster health, not those that lead to further pleasures. Later it is argued that physical health is essential for making physical pleasure possible (504e), but nonetheless, in his summary of the argument at 506cd, it is roundly asserted that the pleasant is to be done for the sake of the good, not vice versa.
perform that one would reasonably undertake to prevent. This would all be quite consistent, but Polus does not see it, and so he falls into Socrates’s web.

But Callicles does not. No longer able to hold his peace, he intervenes on Polus’s behalf.\textsuperscript{37} Like Gorgias, he claims, Polus has, to avoid looking bad, made admissions he ought not to and fallen into contradiction. In particular, he should never have allowed that doing what is unjust is more shameful than suffering it. He misses the distinction between what is shameful by nature (\textit{physis}), and shameful by agreement and convention (\textit{nomos}). By nature to lose is shameful, and the same competitive act or outcome is shameful to the loser, and a fine thing for the winner. Whether it is shameful or fine \textit{by nature} depends entirely on whether it produces benefit, and so an action is shameful (or fine) \textit{by nature} for someone, the one who is harmed (or receives the benefit). Unjust acts are shameful in general, but this is only by convention. By nature they are fine for those they benefit. The weak institute laws not to produce fine actions, but to gain advantage over the strong, who would always win in the absence of social convention and restraint. So they settle for “equality” because they dare not compete for a greater share, since they know they would end up with considerably less if they did.\textsuperscript{38} So there is no intrinsic objective quality, being-a-fine-action, other than the usefulness of the action, to be found here. An action is good and useful for some, bad for others, shameful by one set of standards, fine by another, and that is all.

Callicles makes the evaluation of an act hang firmly on its subjective relation to what people think of it, rather than any objective fact, and so Socrates’s first task in replying is to drive him from this position of strength. He does this by applying the natural distinction between victory and defeat objectively, without any regard to the wisdom or character of the acts from which defeat and victory arise. As a matter of fact, those Callicles admires as strong are often defeated by the “weak” through their use of social cooperation (and sheer numbers) reinforced by the enforcement of “conventional” justice. That means that by objective, natural criteria what the many do in social cooperation is in fact naturally just—it eventuates, after all, in beneficial victory for them.\textsuperscript{39}

Callicles responds that the more powerful are to be identified as the better, nobler, and wiser, those

\textsuperscript{37}\textit{Gorgias} 481b.

\textsuperscript{38}\textit{Gorgias} 482c–486d. This is the Callicles that Nietzsche so admires, the advocate of personal excellence in place of democratic equality and mediocrity. Note that a Pythagorean might seek equality because it is a mathematical proportionality involved in good order, and so beloved by reason, and it is this explanation of the matter Callicles wants to avoid.

\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Gorgias} 488b–489b.
more worthy of admiration as individuals, not simply those stronger through brute force or numbers. Forced to clarify, he allows that the better are those who are wise in the affairs of the city, as well as spirited and competent enough to carry through their wise intentions. This is a thesis Plato will defend in the Republic, for it is the wise and the spirited and courageous whom Plato would make rulers of the city. Socrates asks whether such people need to rule themselves, controlling their own appetites, and is answered that they will live best if they give free reign to their appetites, as long as they are able to satisfy them. The good life is a matter of desiring and getting what you want, and always one should desire more, so that one can satisfy these desires and gain additional pleasure. Satiety is to be avoided. So pleasure is the good.

But every pleasure is accompanied by pain, given the analysis here of the nature of pleasure, for one must first suffer the experience of not having what is wanted to have the lack removed, which is the process of pleasure. Worse, it is only while the pain is being removed that pleasure is fully present, and it fades rapidly as one forgets his previous pain. So it seems that pleasure is not a good in itself, but some pleasures are good, some bad, depending on whether they are useful, that is, whether they produce health. Socrates concludes that health or good order in the soul, not pleasure, is the good. The good itself, whatever it is, must be good in every respect quite independently of circumstances, and so nothing definable in sensible terms and considered as regards its consequences can be the good itself. Certainly pleasure cannot be. It is good insofar as it reflects the presence of order, unity and permanence, that is, the presence of good health in the soul.

What is at issue, it seems, is the function of the soul, which it can only accomplish if it has good health. Its function is to live well, but is living well the maximization of pleasure, or is it a harmonious, unified life free of internal conflict? It seems it cannot be a pleasurable life, for noble and good people seem to experience as much pleasure and pain as the ignoble sort of person that Callicles admits he despises, whether they get their victory or not. So it is the leading of a harmonious life that is the function of the soul, and the wise person with the necessary spirit to lead the city lives well, inasmuch as he leads this life and directs the city to harmony. Health of soul, then, is that condition of the soul that fosters its performing its function, and so is an internal harmony, as the physicians claim health of body is. This internal harmony naturally produces an external

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40 Gorgias 491b.

41 Gorgias 495a.

42 Gorgias 495e–497e. This seems to represent an abandonment of the view in the Protagoras, that a pleasure, even if it is not always good, all things considered, including its consequences, is nonetheless always, considered solely in itself, good.
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harmony in the state when souls in good health lead the state. But Callicles thinks that these people ought to get what they want, perhaps because they deserve it, unlike less virtuous people, and, recognizing their own worth, they ought to demand a good deal. How is this outcome to be guaranteed? It must be if health of soul is to be a virtue, since virtue naturally benefits the person who has it. Perhaps a part of this virtue, then, is an awareness of one’s worth, and a willingness to take what one deserves. If we assume, further, that success in coming to leadership and maintaining it, so that one has the opportunity to reap these just rewards, is presumptive evidence, and the natural result, of one’s virtue, we seem to have Callicles’s position.

Socrates demurs, because it seems to him that health of soul, if it really is harmony, is inconsistent with the demand that one get what one wants regardless of its effects on others, and inconsistent with the lush multiplication of egoistic desires in the first place. But even if the just man will not take what he wants unjustly, and restrains his desires to what he can justly claim as his own, does he in fact get what he can justly ask for? He must, or health of soul is no virtue. Here Socrates and Callicles agree, and they both face the same puzzle, though they solve it in different ways.

Callicles’s solution is that health of soul, if it is virtue, includes enough healthy self-regard to take what one wants, even if this is unjust because it is at odds with the external harmony of the community, and the internal harmony of the soul. Someone who does not take what he wants, or does not want much, is simply lacking in virtue. That puts virtue at odds with itself, but if virtue is not at odds with itself, seeking harmony within and self-aggrandizement without, then there is no virtue at all, for there is no character trait free of internal conflict that will get a person what he wants and deserves if he is a fine and noble person in virtue of that trait. There is a self-conflicting character trait that will, and so that must be what virtue is. Socrates’s solution is that there is an afterlife in which the gods reward the just and punish the unjust, and so a virtuous person will not, and need not, assert himself in the matter, and certainly need not ever act unjustly (that is, in any way harmfully) towards anyone else. But there is also Plato’s third solution, laid out in the Republic, which holds that the just man leads the best life, as he deserves to, simply because he is just, the experience of inner peace and harmony being enough to make one’s life a better one than can possibly be led with an unhealthy soul, and entirely satisfactory, even if one does not get what one wants.”

Here it is worth observing that Plato’s Heaven is not so much a place of just rewards and punishments as a place of preparation for one’s next life on earth. The punishments there are for one’s instruction, to improve one’s character and choices. So in the Republic the final outcome of justice in the Myth of Er is not that one goes to heaven, but that one, being just, can make a good choice for one’s next life, and if a person does not learn from his punishment, he will rashly choose a life full of misery because of its superficial, glittery rewards, honor and power. Life continues, and heaven is just a break to recollect oneself, so this life must be
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between Callicles’s inconsistent self-assertiveness and Socrates’s implausible views about the after-life by rejecting their shared egoistic hedonism.

To return to the Gorgias, finally, having exhausted his interlocutors, Socrates speaks alone, and summarizes his position. He insists that pleasure is sought for the sake of the good, and then asks what the good can be. It is, he decides, a kind of order or organization, which, in a soul, implies self-control, because the rational part must control the rest. Now a self-controlled soul will take its place in a larger order, a moral community, and behave justly within that community, contributing to and maintaining its order. The good itself, then, is rational order.

Wise men claim that partnership and friendship, orderliness, self-control, and justice hold together heaven and earth, and gods and man, and that is why they call this universe a world-order... you’ve failed to notice that proportionate equality has great power among both Gods and men, and you suppose that you ought to practice getting the greater share. That’s because you neglect geometry. 44

A particular human life is a part of a bigger whole, the life of the community, indeed, of the world at large, and so only in a well-formed community, which is just, can one genuinely lead a good life. In such a community, as is observed in the discussion with Polus, injustice will be punished, and so, as a matter of fact, will turn out to be unpleasurable on the whole. The trick is to establish that such a good community is possible or actually exists. The myth of the afterlife at the end, Plato’s first, which Socrates professes to believe, asserts that the world is such a community. So punishment for injustice cannot be avoided, in the long run, though this is, of course, a benefit, since it “makes one good.”

If Socrates is right about the afterlife, then, if we pursue the good itself, we will in fact maximize our pleasure over time, for the good itself is the good of the whole entailing the good of the parts, and so our individual lives will be best fulfilled. So the Socratic craft of pleasure turns out, accidentally, to lead to the good itself if well executed, because in fact the good life is a life of maximal pleasure. This maximization of pleasure, however, is not the nature of the good, but only an attribute of it that follows on its nature, if the world is a just and well-ordered community.

Does the myth express Socrates’s religious views? In the Apology, Socrates says he does not know what comes after death, and affirms that if it is simply unconsciousness, like a deep sleep, that would be a great

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44 Gorgias, 508a.
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enough good not to fear it. But that surely would not establish that justice is to be preferred in our actions, at least not if the same sleep came to all, just and unjust. However, Socrates also says in the *Apology* that the gods do not allow a good man to come to harm, and that surely is because he thinks the world is a just community. Moreover, Xenophon’s Socratic works repeatedly insist that he believed in the existence of the gods, and even have him offering a proof of it. If Socrates did think that the just life is the most pleasant in *this* life, setting aside the afterlife, Callicles found the same proposition absurd and indefensible, so perhaps he does not need the myth himself, but provides it for Callicles,45 and in that case perhaps the historical Socrates did that sort of thing fairly often. Indeed, an appeal is made at the end of the *Gorgias* that, in oratory as in every other enterprise, we do whatever is needed to get people to be just, so perhaps this provides an example of the proper use of rhetoric to persuade through deception. Indeed, in the *Republic* we are told that the Gods never lie, but this is not because lying cannot be the right thing to do, but because they, unlike human beings, have no reason to fear their enemies, and do not have mad or foolish friends.46 In the *Phaedo*, Socrates states that

> it is fitting for a man to risk the belief—for the risk is a noble one—that this, or something like this, is true about our souls and their dwelling places, since the soul is evidently immortal, and a man should repeat this to himself as if it were an incantation, which is why I have been prolonging my tale.47

But it is only in the *Phaedo* that *this* justification of the telling of the myth can be made. In the *Gorgias* it is not yet shown that the soul is immortal. But whatever the economy of Socrates’s own beliefs, Plato sees himself as providing the arguments that Socrates could not find for the Socratic position, because Socrates did not know of the separated Forms and could not demonstrate the immortality of the soul. He presents Socrates himself as the model for his lying Guardians later in the *Republic*.

**The discussion of justice in the opening of the Republic** begins in a very different place than that in the *Gorgias*, with a consideration of the possibility that justice is somehow associated with the keeping of contracts, a view that may reflect Socratic thought if we take the *Crito* as a guide. A definition is sought for justice, it being observed that it bears some relation to giving what is owed, *to duty*. It is proposed first that it

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45There is perhaps an implicit plea here that Callicles, even if he does not accept it, allow the myth to stand uncriticized, because even though he might see that one ought to seek order and health for their own sake, most people will not and will need this promise of pleasure as an incentive. In any case, Callicles would be one of those atheists, perhaps of the less noxious sort that has a good character, talked about in *Laws* X.

46382c–e.

47*Phaedo* 114d.
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is a matter of following some list of rules, for instance, always speaking the truth and paying one’s debts. What is owed is adherence to a specific list of duties, perhaps those understood in a social contract like that Socrates relies on in the Crito. But Socrates observes here that it would not be just to keep a contract if it were harmful to do so, for instance, by returning deposited weapons when the depositor is in an unsound state of mind and likely to commit murder. Following the contract is not always just, not even when it is a fair contract, fairly struck. So the discussants turn to the notion of the good, and it is suggested that a just person is one who does good to friends, evil to enemies. Thus we would pay to each what we owe in another sense, namely what is appropriate to his status in relation to ourselves.

Socrates observes that justice is always useful, in war as well as in peace. So it seems we will have to identify what we owe, not merely to our allies in times of war, but to our friends when there is no competitive enterprise afoot. He wants to isolate justice from competitive contexts, which he thinks inessential to it, and so, isolate it from the necessity of making a contract. Perhaps everyone is to be treated as a friend, so that evil is done to no one by a just person. Then, looking back at the rule-following approach, the doing of one’s duties, we can observe that the rules may be a guide for the just, but the good, for everyone, is in fact the defining aim of the just. That is why the just person will not return the weapon to someone not in his right mind, no matter what his ‘duty’ is. But Socrates’s companions don’t take the point, and they suggest it is useful to keep contracts even in peacetime. Socrates resists this attempt to bring the thing back once more to contracts, raising several inconclusive objections of some cumulative weight.

First, if this is what justice is, Socrates thinks it is not of much use, at least in comparison to those other arts bearing on such productive cooperative enterprises as agriculture or sailing. The objection seems to be that the real core of cooperative life, the mutual pursuit of the common good of the community, is not captured in this sort of justice. If justice is only the observance of a certain restraint, the good life may require and make use of justice, but it is certainly not defined by it. The good life is one of active cooperation, that is, active cooperation among friends joined in a common enterprise for the benefit of all, not simply a solipsistic pursuit of private aims with a certain restraint in interfering with others’ pursuit of their private aims.

A second objection is that just people would, on this account, make good thieves, as long as they steal from their enemies. To understand justice we need, it seems, to understand why just people would never misuse their craft, and the reason is that just people (correctly) identify their good with that of others. This, of course, is because someone who knows the master art pursues the good itself in that art, not something good for the sake of another thing, and so it makes no sense for such people to use their skill in acquiring this good
(for themselves) to undermine acquisition of this good (by others). The good itself cannot be a private good at odds with the good of others—the master art does not allow of a competitive application.

In the third place, Socrates asks who the friends and enemies referred to here are, those truly such, or those we perhaps mistakenly take to be such? If it is the latter, it would be just to harm good people whenever we mistake a friend for an enemy. Perhaps we should take a friend to be whoever is in fact good to us as well as being believed to be so. But is it just to harm anyone at all, even a true enemy, if doing that makes them worse, i.e. worse in point of virtue? Perhaps it is just to "harm" others when one justly punishes others, but that means benefitting them, since punishment improves them.\textsuperscript{48}

But before all this can be properly digested, Thrasymachus the Sophist breaks into the discussion, and demands that justice be defined in sensory or naturalistic terms, not as "the right, the beneficial, the profitable, the gainful, or the advantageous." Then he defines it as "the advantage of the stronger," which, as Socrates points out, seems to violate his own requirement, though perhaps he means "what appears to the stronger to be to his advantage."\textsuperscript{49} If we are to define an evaluative term in non-evaluative terms, and so gain increased understanding of it, we have to resort to some notion, such as the notion of pleasure, that bridges the gap between these two sorts of terms. Pleasure is a sensible, naturally occurring state of an animal, but one with an intentional element, so that we can identify it at least as involving an opinion to the effect that something is good. It is an opinion (evaluation, attitude) someone as a matter of fact observably and actually holds. How do we move from this to a correct opinion about the good, and so the good itself? Perhaps we can identify the good as what is pleasurable to everyone in the long run, or what is pleasurable to the most experienced or most rational, and if so, we might hope to get to know the good through the senses. The account given by Thrasymachus, then, would be that an act is just if it is prescribed by the rulers with an intention that they gain

\textsuperscript{48}The point is pursued at length in the account of punishment and its justification in \textit{Laws} IX.

\textsuperscript{49}\textit{Republic} I, 336e–339a. The violation of his own requirement is not so easily avoided. He imagines that his view of the good is somehow 'factual,' being a matter of good common sense, but, of course, it is not. It is a matter of judging the value of a thing. (Of course, there can be truths, facts, about the values of things, but Thrasymachus does not admit that.)

\textsuperscript{50}I use "intentional" here as philosophers often do, not to mean something one intends or does on purpose, but rather to designate an act or state which by its nature "stretches out to" (the meaning of the Latin \textit{intendere}) another thing, that is, something indicating something outside itself and given meaning by that. Speaking is intentional, then, as is anger, and pleasure, since pleasure involves not merely a pleasant feeling but something identified as its source. (Very often the intentional thing is caused by what it stretches out toward.) We take pleasure in something, and the feeling is understood as pleasure only if it is assigned to what we take pleasure in. That is why the pleasure produced by drinking when we are thirsty, which aims, as it were, at the relief of thirst, contains within itself, essentially, a motivation to action, to drinking, and we find the drinking pleasant. The point that pleasure has a certain intentionality is discussed especially in Plato's late work, the \textit{Philebus}. 
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advantage from it. Thrasymachus is deliberately trying to find a way alternative to the one Plato defends later in the Republic. He seeks a way that does not depend on introducing the Form of the Good. He wants a moral theory that accounts for our judgments without any reference to objective value of any kind. Somehow subjective value, the opinion that something is good, which is observable, is to serve the function of objective value in such a theory. If subjective valuations lie at the base of the notion of the good, the good for a given sort of animal, say, might be whatever that species values or finds good. Plato does not think this definition of objective value in terms of subjective value possible. The best we can do is bring it all back to the Good Itself, and that must be familiar to us through reason and recollection of the Form of the Good, since the senses will not present it to us without the aid of recollection.

Thrasymachus’s definition would, of course, support Callicles’s efforts in the Gorgias. Socrates objects first that the stronger may establish laws that are not to his advantage, mistakenly, and then it is to the advantage of the stronger, and so just, that the laws not be obeyed. To this Thrasymachus replies that the just is to the advantage of the stronger, but the stronger considered as such, that is, considered as someone who does not err concerning his advantage. So now it is just if and only if it is in accord with a rule prescribed by a ruler to his own advantage, and not mistakenly so, that is, in such a way that the ruler acts competently and correctly as a ruler. Socrates replies that a ruler, or any practitioner of an art, considered as such, acts not to his own advantage, but to the advantage of the subject of his art, what is ruled by (him in employing) the art. So it seems that the art of ruling would not, considered as such, be used to the advantage of the ruler, but only to the advantage of the ruled, and to get people to practice this art, which is not to their own advantage, we must rely on their loving and wishing to benefit the ruled, or else we have to pay them.

This brings things around once more to the notion that the just person always strives to benefit others, but, of course, Thrasymachus is having none of it. He rejoins that each craft seeks not only the profit of its object, but also that of its practitioner. Moreover, this means that the craft of the ruler is not justice, nor is it

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51 As a matter of fact, of course, he would say that it goes the other way. We know what holding an opinion about the good is only if we know the good as something out there we can hold an opinion about, just as we know what an opinion about a cat is only if we know first how we might, at least roughly speaking, identify a cat.

52 Republic I, 340c.

53 If Thrasymachus were to accept Socrates point here, his view would be identical to that of the historical Socrates. Denying separated forms, he would identify the form of the good as something rooted in human nature, so that the opinions of the strongest, that is, the wisest, person, who understands her own nature, would establish what is in fact good for human beings, and this good would never exist in separation from human beings. It would be constituted by a certain kind of observable human well-being, a life of maximal pleasure.
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a craft at all to be just, nor a virtue. Rather, injustice is the craft and the virtue of a ruler. Socrates would rather have thought that there are two crafts at work, the craft tending to its object’s welfare, and another craft, the craft of wage-earning. But the point is set aside, and the question is put, is it more profitable to a person (is it appropriate to the wage-earning art) to be just or unjust? Thrasymachus claims the latter. Injustice is a virtue, and, as the art of profiting oneself, the master craft which should rule other crafts. So the Master Craft Socrates seeks is injustice rather than justice.

In reply, Socrates argues that this supposed master art, injustice, is no art at all, on the ground that there are no competitive arts, in the sense of arts in which the practitioners oppose one another and disagree (as long as no one is mistaken), but all arts are cooperative. But injustice, aiming as it does at the advantage of the artisan, is competitive. It seems clear that a response could be made here, for it might be claimed that the art of chess, for instance, is competitive. Now in some sense the art is cooperative, since true chess-players will agree in chess theory, in their admiration of a good move, and so forth, but they will also, in the practice of their art in actual chess-playing, as opposed to theoretical investigations into chess-playing, aim at contrary outcomes, since all will aim for themselves to win. Indeed, it may even be that part of the art here is to induce other practitioners to make mistakes in the art, so that we make, if we can, deceptive moves. Thus one might be unjust in one’s actions, aiming to deceive and harm (?) another. So chess players aim in one way to outdo one another, and in another way, they do not. If it were put in this way, then Socrates would have to pursue this question: Is the good life obtained through a cooperative art, or a competitive one? Of course, it may be that the art is in some branches and aspects cooperative, in some competitive, or perhaps we need to develop a notion of fair (just) competition. Plato would more likely argue that our example is artificial, and that beneficial competition is always like that he so often describes in talking about his own method of disputation, where to lose is to benefit, since one is corrected in a false opinion, and the whole procedure, combative as it may look, is essentially cooperative. Chess might be that way if its real goal is not to win, but, say, to produce beautiful games or improve one’s skills.

Socrates finishes up his argument against Thrasymachus by remarking that injustice always produces strife, so that a city in which it dominates will lack unity, friendship and common purpose, and so accomplish less than it would in the external arena if it were just. It also causes dissension when present between two people, and even when found within a single person’s soul, so that such people are subject to civil war within their own minds, and can accomplish little. He goes on to identify justice as the virtue characteristic of a soul, so that a soul that performs its function well, which is living, performs it well through justice. Still, Socrates
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has not said what justice or injustice is to have such effects, to be profitable or not, or to be virtue or vice, and so he bemoans his conclusion as ill supported and premature.

The dialogue seems to have wound down to an end, but now the whole issue is reopened by Glaucon and Adeimantus. First Glaucon speaks, and claims that justice should be valued not only for its results, but also for its own sake. (As we have seen, some such move is needed to avoid the impasse at the end of the Gorgias as well.) But the argument just given suggests that justice is to be valued chiefly for its results. Indeed, it brings peace and cooperation, even within the individual soul, so that, in an individual or community, a good life is possible, but it has not been praised for its own sake. Indeed, most people regard justice as inconvenient viewed simply by itself, as naturally bad, and the doing of injustice as naturally good, but they are clever enough to see that they are unable to escape the penalty of injustice, and so behave justly because they recognize their weakness. To show this, Glaucon imagines someone who could get away with it, due to his possession of the magical ring of Gyges, which enables him to be unjust whenever he wishes without being observed. The thought experiment is quite pointedly directed at Socratic views. If we all seek pleasure and freedom from pain, and these things alone, egoistically, then we would all, if we possessed the ring, use it to act unjustly. It would be the only reasonable thing to do. Glaucon’s brother Adeimantus adds that people in fact educate their children along the same lines, particularly in their talk about the gods, who provide external sanctions for just behavior. Indeed, people imagine that the gods can be bribed, so that the wealth gained from injustice can be used to buy initiations and sacred rites guaranteeing the soul a good afterlife. In effect, traditional religion assumes the world is, not a just community, but one very like our own communities, in which wealthy and powerful people can safely exploit those less fortunate than themselves. So the brothers, rejecting consequentialist arguments in favor of justice, demand that Socrates show that justice is in itself a good that makes life worthwhile, and without which life cannot be lived well at all. What was required at the end of the Gorgias is made quite explicit, and the remainder of the Republic is devoted to providing it.14

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14 It might be questioned if it is the subject or the brothers that stand in need of this expansion, for Socrates claims that “in what I said to Thrasymachus I thought I showed that justice is better than injustice.” If we take Plato (?) at his word here, and do not assume that this is an arch way of indicating that Socrates has fallen short, though he has not realized it, while Glaucon does, then mustn’t we assume that Glaucon has missed something? Perhaps not, for Socrates may have shown what he says he has without establishing an understanding why it is so. So he is not objecting that he has already done this, which the brothers seek, but only making it clear that it was not necessary to do it in order to show that it is unreasonable not to confess that justice is better than injustice. In part, of course, Socrates accedes to their wishes because they really want to know and are willing to listen, even as Socrates speculates somewhat beyond what he knows to be the case. This is a different audience than Thrasydamus provided, and a more worthy one. In particular, unlike Thrasydamus, they are willing to let Socrates speak of the good, and Socrates eventually justifies their trust with his account of the Forms, arguing that there are objective values to be found in the world. But he only constructs upon, he does not abandon, the arguments made against Thrasydamus, nonetheless. See Roslyn Weiss, “Wise Guys and Smart Alecks in Republic 1 and
4. JUSTICE IN THE CITY-STATE

It isn’t merely the origin of a city that we’re considering, it seems, but the origin of a luxurious city. And that may not be a bad idea, for by examining it, we might very well see how justice and injustice grow up in cities. Yet the true city, in my opinion, is the one we’ve described, the healthy one, as it were. But let’s study a city with a fever . . . Then we’ll have to seize some of our neighbor’ land if we’re to have enough pasture and plough land. And won’t our neighbors want to seize part of ours as well, if they too have surrendered themselves to the endless acquisition of money and overstepped the limit of their necessities? . . . our next step will be war, Glaucon, won’t it?

Socrates, in Plato, Republic II, 372e–373e

Plato begins his own account of justice in the Republic with the proposal that political justice, the justice found in a city-state, be examined first, since its nature will be more easily ascertained than that of the justice found in a human soul. He assumes that justice in both places is the same thing, a kind of order or unity, given his suggestions in the Gorgias and at the end of his interchange with Thrasymachus. Why would it be more evident in the city? One likely reason is that the parts of a city are relatively easy to make out and justice is to be found in the relations among those parts. The parts of the soul will be much more easily identified once we see how it works in a city-state. A more sophisticated reason might be that justice is more easily identified in something self-contained that needs no external connections to complete its nature, and Plato thought human beings could only lead complete lives within a community. 55 The fact that human beings are none of them self-sufficient is what makes a city necessary. The justice of a human being, it turns out, depends on the nature of another thing, the community, whereas a city-state’s justice does not require the consideration of anything outside the city.

Plato hopes to get an account of justice out of an account of the origin and functioning of the state,


55Indeed, within a good, just community, one that is above all unified, one city rather than many. So Republic VII, 462a, 519e–520a. This means that the citizens must each identify with the community, that is, take the community’s life to be their life, or an essential part of it, so that the community’s welfare is not reducible simply to the aggregation of individual happiness (even if this aggregation is an essential part of the community’s welfare). The community has its own interest, above all unity, to which it makes sense to sacrifice individual happiness, to some degree. See Dominic Scott (2008).
then. This proceeds in two phases, in which two city-states are proposed. First, an account is given of a city with an economic, but no political structure. People must specialize to maximize productivity, each pursuing a single trade, and there must be a marketplace in which they can exchange goods, there must be currency as well, and retailers, and even laborers who have no craft or land, but offer unskilled labor to earn their keep. But no rulers are described and no government, no decision-making mechanisms. Part of the reason for this is that the city does nothing as a unit that would require a government, its entire function being caught up in the relations among its citizens. When the second state is developed, it is its external relations, its conflicts with other states, that introduces the need for a military and a government to direct the actions of the state. The second city-state is introduced in response to the demand that the citizens of the first be provided with luxuries, more than they can produce with their own resources, so that they come into competition with other states. Self-conscious identity, self-discipline and internal structure all arise from conflict with others.

Socrates claims that the true city is the first one, even if an examination of the second is more likely to lead to the discovery of justice and injustice. Indeed, it may be that justice is not to be found in the first state, since it is simply unnecessary—or already present in each of the individual citizens. It is a good community, but that is because it is restricted (and rational) in its desires, and so naturally in order. It has no need to be put in good order, since there are no internal conflicts to resolve. But the new, luxurious state not only comes into conflict with other states, the luxurious impulses of its citizens put them into conflict with each other. The first city is modeled, it seems, on the Socratic understanding of the soul. Everyone desires the same things (including one another’s welfare), and everyone plans rationally to get what they want. Just as the Socratic soul has no conflicting parts, the first city has none either.

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56 This isn’t a very good argument. Decisions must be made by the whole city how to conduct the economy, for instance, and so all the problems of distributive justice raised in John Rawls’s work emerge, and require joint action, action arising from interaction and discussion of the matters at issue. Perhaps Plato does not see this because, like Locke, he does not regard the framework of the economy as something we can discuss and decide upon. As far as he can see, there is only one way to do it, and if that way creates conflict, then we must live with the conflict. He does regard the structure of the government as something to be decided on by the community, and that itself probably marks an advance in rational autonomy at the communal level over what we can see for the most part in societies before the Greeks.

57 Plato does not consider the possibility that the natural world simply forces conflict upon us, by its niggardly and unreliable provision for our needs, or that other, luxurious city-states will force us into war in time. He seems to think such problems arise because people have more children than their resources will support, which is irrational and can be avoided. Ideally, rationality should enable people to get on in the world without problems, for the world is a good and orderly place.
But this can be given another reading. For one thing, as usual in Plato, we need to take into account the audience, that is, the possibility of irony. These folks are liberal young men of the upper class, who clearly take philosophy seriously, after their fashion. But their aristocratic background and identification with their city is repeatedly emphasized in the course of dialogue. They understand the necessity of cooperation, and so justice, within the city, but they have no problem with the fiercest of competition when the supremacy of their own city is at issue. And this, even if we defend it with the subtleties of the last paragraph, is not subtle. It is the same problem that faces the individual citizens in their relations to one another within the city, and the individual cities among the communities competing for land, but the young men can’t see it. The problem faced by the *citizens* requires, they think, cooperation, which they interpret as setting the competitive success of the city first, ahead of, for instance, the demands of small-scale commerce, which might benefit from peace. Large-scale commerce demands warfare, no doubt, because it involves imperialism, the exploitation of foreign cities. In brief, these are Athenians of the Empire. “Cooperation” here is cooperation with the central aristocratic aim from the non-aristocratic population, for the “good of the city as a whole.” But they respond to the same problem in the relations between *cities* by trying to improve their own city to the point where it can defeat the others in warfare. What would happen if all the cities were just and ideal? Surely it would mean an end to warfare? Certainly not, for they are all luxurious cities, demanding a share of the total resources that would leave others without enough to lead a good life (at least, a good life by their definition). So just cities turn out to be unable to get along with one another, which should be an absurd enough outcome to suggest a second look at the thing. It is well to take the ideal city that results from this investigation with a grain of salt—Plato may not think it so perfectly just as all that, after all. Perhaps real justice requires that we give up aiming at goals that cannot be achieved without damaging conflict, that we give up luxury.

And that raises the problem whether the structure of the just soul echoing such an ideal city is in fact the structure of an ideally just soul at all in Plato’s mind. Perhaps adjustments are necessary. The Socratic soul can be approximated by putting severer restraints on the desires, restricting them to a level of desire that does not harm others. Perhaps if we do not see this, and insist that reason give freer rein to the desires than that,

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58For this, see Peterman (2000) 52–56. It is an unusual reading of the dialogue, but parallel to the way the later dialogues are generally read. Why is it only in the *Republic* that irony should be absent, or real difficulties raised and left lying with no intention that they be taken seriously in reassessing the final result of the discussion?

59Compare *Republic* I, 251d–253d, where justice is identified as the source of cooperative behavior within a band of robbers. An interesting treatment of this and related issues that I think is right-headed, is Donald R. Morrison, “The Utopian Character of Plato’s Ideal city,” Ch. 9 in Ferrari (2007).
we reveal our own selfishness, for what we are maintaining, then, is that self-conscious identity requires
exploitation of others. Perhaps self-conscious identity is not such a good thing, after all, then, and simple
rationality would be better. Or, to seek the best self we can, the ultimate aim of honor, might be to seek
perfect rationality, in which a rational love for others requires that we not put ourselves ahead of others, after
all. In the face of that sort of proposal, almost all of us are likely to start hedging and trimming, breaking off
the argument and finding other business to attend to—and leave ourselves open to Socratic irony. But let us
move on, and see what happens in the dialogue.

When the luxurious city arises, then, from the first sort of city, it becomes involved in war, and it is
that which introduces political, and not mere economic, structure. War requires specialists if the city is to
do it well, so there will be professional soldiers, whose craft is to achieve victory in competition with others.
A person who is to succeed at such a thing requires not merely self-restraint, discipline and hard work, the
economic virtues, but also courage and spirit, that is, the will to victory. At this point one might wonder how
Plato could allow that there is a craft or occupation here at all, given that he insisted earlier that no art is
intrinsically competitive, in order to rule out injustice as an art in the discussion with Thrasymachus. Most
likely he would claim that warfare is not an art at all, for it is not something that would be pursued by the
rational part of the soul. Spirit and courage, not reason and knowledge, are the immediate requirements for
war. Warfare is an activity in which one must specialize if one is to do well, but not an activity of reason. This
throws some light on the first city, in which only the rational pursuit of the good has a place. Such a city would
have no competitive arts, it seems, and be in need of none as long as it was not forced to defend itself.

It also suggests the great problem with the introduction of the specialists in warfare—they would,
being dominated by spirit, the desire for victory, rather than desire for the good, likely turn on their fellow
citizens and begin to run the city for themselves. So it seems that our guardians, as Plato calls them, must be
friendly toward those they know, as a dog is, and only competitive towards those they do not know. They
will be persons of honor. This means a Guardian is in a way philosophical, for he must love those he knows,

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60 It is not the development of economic classes that provides structure. Plato does not see the function of the state as
overseeing and moderating conflict between economic classes. With the introduction of economic classes he sees the emergence of
several cities within the polity, inasmuch as the interests of one class are conceived by people to clash with those of another. Perhaps
a federation of states could be formed, but Plato does not pursue the matter of such federations, though it seems he really should have.

61 That is, they are so from inclination, but not due to reason. To become virtuous, perhaps, a person must begin with
suitable irrational inclinations, which are then later brought under the surveillance of reason. There is, of course, something of an
implicit insult here, comparing the noble young men who make up the army to dogs.
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and Plato identifies this as a rational love. Indeed, reason loves whatever it knows, inasmuch as what it knows always reflects the good (which reason loves) insofar as it is knowable. This, of course, smooths the way later for Plato to select those to be trained as philosophers from among the soldiers.

The next issue Plato raises is the manner in which the guardians are to be educated, that is, with an eye to developing strength of body, spirit and courage, and an honorable desire to seek the good of the whole state. This, he thinks, should have some bearing on the introduction of justice into the state. Before pursuing Plato’s line of thought, though, we need to observe some notable things he does not say here. For one thing, there has been no mention of any contractual arrangement among the citizens. Plato associates contracts with the notion that justice and good will toward others is a troublesome sort of thing, which we would only rationally pursue for the sake of some payoff. He does not start, as contract theorists do, with the assumption that people are by nature at odds with one another. Rather, he assumes that people by nature value one another’s welfare, for all rationally value the good as such. So cooperation, for Plato, does not need to be explained, except insofar as we might note that reasonable schemes of cooperation, such as specialization and exchange of goods, would be worked out by rational people living together. Moreover, even after he introduces competition, he sees the task as one of restricting it to interaction with strangers, so that the cooperative instincts will continue to do their job at home. It would seem that our naturally cooperative natures are in fact dog-like, that is, we get along with, and value the welfare of, those we know well, not strangers. And if our rational natures value everyone’s welfare, well, they have to consider the good according to all the parts of the soul, not just their own, as rulers, and so will have to accede to the luxurious state and the conflicts arising from it. This provides the best defense of the luxurious state as necessary.\(^{62}\) The body, which forces upon us lower, egocentric desires, must be ruled by reason, and the rational soul is not permitted to abandon the body—commit suicide or become a perfect ascetic, following only rational desires—but is rather put in charge of bringing the body to as much order as is possible for it. It is necessary that the lower, egocentric desires, both in the body and the state, be regulated by reason, for they cannot be eliminated. In any case, Plato certainly does not launch into a discussion how to establish international law. Perhaps it would be a good idea, but that sort of regulation of

\(^{62}\)Perhaps it is not a very good defense. Should the rational part of the soul devote itself to benefitting its body, as the body considers benefit? Surely not. It should genuinely benefit the body. Otherwise, it panders to the irrational desires. The same goes for the ruler, in his relation to the less rational people in the state. It is not his job to benefit them in accord with their standards of what is beneficial. Rather, he must strive to benefit them genuinely. But perhaps one could insist that if we don’t pander a little, we can gain no influence. One could also insist that gaining influence in that way is destroying rational autonomy, not furthering it. If they won’t listen to reason, all we can do is continue trying to reason with them.
competition is not the source of justice as it is now conceived.

Plato has in mind the commonplace notion among his upper-class friends that the state should be in the hands of the military caste, and justice in the state depends on their sense of honor and their humane feelings toward those they rule. For now, he thinks we should depend on the good character of the rulers to keep things running justly, not on institutions, as a contractual democracy might. That is why it seems natural to turn next to the education of the guardians, those naturally suited to take on the role of aristocratic rulers of the state. He takes an oligarchical, not a democratic, outlook. In this, he is much like Confucius (Kong Qiu) in China, who similarly depends upon appropriate education, within a suitable tradition, to develop jen (humanity) in the rulers, not on the Legalist institutional strategy—though it should be noted that the democratic and contractual approaches familiar to Plato were unknown to Confucius.

The education Plato outlines draws heavily on traditional aristocratic conceptions of the appropriate education for young men, though, not without fanfare, he does introduce some innovations and oddities. He thinks it should begin with music and poetry (as did Confucius), which must be designed to rouse and reinforce rational desires in the student, namely, (1) love of the good for its own sake, (2) a desire for rational autonomy and stability, so that one is not unsteady in one’s rational behavior, and (3) a desire for knowledge and love of the truth. It is traditional religious myth that Plato is concerned with, and he details any number of stories from Homer and elsewhere that he claims undermine rational desires, by getting their listeners to sympathize with and play the roles of low characters, or by giving descriptions of the behavior of the gods and the afterlife that suggest that unjust and otherwise vicious behavior unrestrained by reason are beneficial, even in the long run, and acceptable.

If they do imitate, they [the future Guardians] must imitate from childhood what is

63When Plato was older, and had decided that incorruptible Guardians could not be found or depended on, he shifted his reliance to the laws, which both guarantee citizen’s rights and enforce the educational institutions underlying the state, but in the Republic the laws are treated not as a constitution but as an administrative code that will take care of itself once proper people are set up as the Guardians.

64And so, Plato views the usual education provided in Greek city-states as, historically, a corruption of the ideal form of education he lays out in the Republic, or an imperfect realization of that ideal. The ideal education is an aristocratic education. It seems that the economically oriented majority of his ideal state are not provided it, but only the soldiers, and the guardians of the state recruited from the soldiers. Indeed, for Plato commerce and the trades are intrinsically corrupting, for they serve the lowest part of the soul, not even addressing the desire for honor, which is, of course, an aristocratic concern, but only that for the power to satisfy one’s bodily desires, that is, money. See Hare (1982) part 7, and part 9.

65Perhaps this is a desire for unity, without which there is not a single person to lead a good life or receive benefit. So unity is a sine qua non for happiness.
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appropriate for them, namely, people who are courageous, self-controlled, pious, and free, and their actions. They mustn’t be clever at doing or imitating slavish or shameful actions, lest from enjoying the imitation, they come to enjoy the reality. Or haven’t you noticed that imitations practiced from youth become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice and thought?  

Interestingly, these children are raised to fight and rule, and so they are not to learn crafts or practice them. To earn a living at a craft would, of course, be beneath the dignity of an aristocrat. (Confucius also insists that the Gentleman is no “specialist.”)

With the discussion of the right sort of music, which takes a Pythagorean line, the influence of different scales, rhythms, and instruments on the soul is outlined. The soul, Plato holds, responds to and is formed by the different harmonies, and so music must be chosen carefully. A fourth rational love is introduced here, the love of order and unity, of mathematical harmony, expressed in sensible form, and this leads naturally to a rational love of boys, who themselves are beautiful in this way, though sex must not enter into it. The love of a boy is essentially love of what can become a mature rational being, with the nurture and instruction that love wishes to provide. A purified form of the customary education of an upper class boy, which involves a personal relation with an adult mentor who enjoys his company, is envisioned.

After a discussion of physical training and medicine, Plato moves on to the education of a good judge, who, he says, must become aware of injustice and its character through experience of others over a long period of time, not, of course, from experience of injustice in his own soul. Knowledge involves acquaintance with a correct model of the thing known, and knowledge of a vice presupposes knowledge of the corresponding virtue of which it is a lack, and so “a vicious person would never know either himself or a virtuous one, whereas a naturally virtuous person, when educated, will in time acquire knowledge of both virtue and vice.” He then finally considers who should be the rulers, and takes it to be clear that these would be the older, and best, of the Guardians. We should choose those who most identify their own interests with those of the city. Such

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67 But why not? Perhaps we cannot fully understand injustice unless we experience it in ourselves. Or perhaps we have no right to judge others for succumbing to the power of injustice and its temptations if we have never experienced that power ourselves. Plato thinks the emotions need to be educated as well as the mind to become virtuous, but he does not conceive, it seems, that one must pass through vice to become free of it.

68 Republic III 409d. So not only does Plato not conceive that one must pass through vice to come to understand it and be free of it, he argues explicitly that knowledge of virtue, and therefore virtue itself, does not require this, but rather knowledge of vice requires knowledge of virtue. He clearly has not entirely escaped from Socrates’s Intellectualism.
people will hold a belief that they must do what is best for the city, a belief which can only be lost involuntarily, since it is true, and so a good thing. That is, it can only be lost due to failure of memory or the introduction of bad arguments one cannot answer (the failure of reason), or due to fear or pleasure (the overcoming of reason by other parts of the soul), but not due to the willing (and effective) search for the truth. One never voluntarily loses the truth, for there is, quite in accord with Socratic principles, no weakness of will within the intellect, but only within the soul as a whole, with its conflicting desires. He renames the erstwhile Guardians “Auxiliaries” at this point, as they guard only against external enemies, and reserves the title “Guardians” for the rulers, who guard against both external enemies and misguided internal friends.

The course of education for the Guardians, then, is this: They will usually be children of the Auxiliary/Guardian class, but may be promoted, due to conspicuous virtue, from outside it. They will serve in the army, and receive a purified traditional upper-class Greek education, with an opportunity to study mathematics. At age 30 (having served well in the army, and shown an aptitude for and considerable interest in mathematics), they will be selected out as one of the best of their generation for five years of training in philosophy and the sciences, after which they will serve 15 years in office. At age 50, the best of the office holders will be chosen to undertake further training in philosophy, coming to the study of the Idea of the Good. After the completion of this course of study, these will become Guardians, guiding the state, and overseeing education, with the other Guardians, and spending what time they have left from this in study for the rest of their lives. In effect, the rulers will be living the lives of scholars or university professors, having completed their higher degrees, while their administrators will be college graduates.

It is necessary to get the citizens, both everyday folk and Auxiliaries, to accept their rulers, a problem

69 Republic III, 413e–414c.

70 Or perhaps wise elders, proper professors belonging to that type.

71 Exactly how the Guardians exercise authority is not specified, but presumably, like other wise men in Greece, they will provide the laws of the community, that is to say, the constitution, and preserve them. It seems the Auxiliaries would implement the laws, including detailed statutes reflecting the spirit of them. Surely some veto power would have to be granted to the Guardians if they are to perform their job, but Plato does not discuss this.

72 Why is it necessary? From the point of view of the lower classes, their lives will be better than they would be in any other sort of state in which they did not follow the wise. Why? Because they would avoid the worst excesses, enjoy greater unity both within themselves and with others in the state, and would in fact value and pursue many fine things, the possession of which would make them blessed, even though they don’t know why they are fine, and don’t value them for the right reasons. In truth, the lower classes will continue to lead a miserable life, and in the cave analogy it is suggested that the lives of such people are like the lives of those living in Hades, scarcely in touch with reality at all, but living in a rather unpleasant dream. Republic 516c4–d7 and its reference to Homer, Odyssey 11. 488–91.
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that did not seem important before, because the Auxiliaries enjoy a monopoly of military force, perhaps, or because everyone easily sees the necessity of a specialized army for defense and aggrandizement of the state. Plato proposes that a myth be introduced, to appeal to the irrational natures of the people, a myth that would no doubt become the mainstay of the poetry with which the young guardians, and the common people as well, are educated—the people will be said to have been born from the earth, some with an admixture of silver or gold, and so suited to be auxiliaries or guardians. All are siblings, and all belong to the land and the land to them. The myth makes voluntary (contractual) enrollment in the state difficult. Special dispensations of some sort would be needed to naturalize a citizen. Moreover, it establishes the right of the citizens to their land, though, ironically, the state was established to take away the land of others for the sake of luxury. Plato’s dependence on traditional aristocratic methods of government is especially clear here. But he certainly does not envision a traditional life style for his Guardians. They will live modestly on salary from the state, possessing as little private property as possible, and will be forbidden even to handle gold or silver. They will live together like soldiers on campaign, and share a common mess. The point is that there be nothing to draw the Guardians away from identification with the city. They will have no private life at all.

It is immediately objected that the Guardians, rulers of the state, must live in poverty, then. The reply is that this is true, and a good thing. Everyone in the city is to perform his function first of all, and should enjoy only that style of happiness consistent with his function. This means that no one at all is to be extravagantly wealthy or privileged, but most especially not the Guardians. Extremes of wealth and poverty create dissension in the city, and unity is the aim. Indeed, the city is not to be allowed to grow greater in size than

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73This myth was in fact believed by the Athenians concerning their own country. They took it that they were autochthonous, sprung from the land, and had always inhabited it, unlike the rest of the Greeks, all of whom had at some time or other migrated from abroad. This was a notable point of Athenian self-justification, an important political myth, and perhaps Plato meant to hint that Athens had descended from an ideal state of the sort he envisions here. That would explain the presence of the myth. So it is not only Sparta and Crete that he points to as descendants of the ideal state in Greece.

74Plato’s utopia is rooted, of course, in the peculiarly Greek habit of constructing constitutions through reason and negotiation for city-states, and reflects the Greek view that a social order can be designed and deliberately adopted. Nonetheless, his proposal was shocking. The point at issue is that the enforced poverty of the rulers is balanced by the fact that the bulk of the citizens, the economic class, are deprived of any political rights in the community. Plato saw no alternative simply because most people are irrational, and so in the ideal state they would accept the rational as their rulers. Plato has no real conception of anything like universal human rights, and certainly did not recognize a right to self-rule. (Perhaps, if he had, he would have said that one’s real self is the rational soul, and argued that one is more truly ruled by oneself in his ideal state than he might be in a democracy, as long as the rational is in charge.) He does, however, hold that for the state to do well each citizen must be happy in accord with his nature. If people are dissatisfied because they cannot rule themselves in the political arena, and they are not adapted to this by their rational attainments, then they need to be convinced to obey their betters, not to be extended a right of self-rule, and the Guardians may use force and lies to convince them.
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is consistent with unity. We are constructing a luxurious city, and that means we are setting out to satisfy the non-rational parts of the soul, not only the rational part. Three options are available—in one the rational part of the soul alone is attended to, and the non-rational parts are satisfied only to the extent suitable for the satisfaction of rational aims. These rational aims include the provision of rational structure and guidance to what is not rational, but capable of rational order, and so the Guardians will not withdraw to establish themselves in a city of the first sort discussed, ignoring the other citizens. On the other hand they will live the rational life in a sub-community modeled after that first city. In a second approach, the rational part of the soul can be abandoned, and the non-rational parts given all they want. That will result in an unjust city, with internal dissension, great wealth, and great poverty. In the third approach, adopted by Plato, the non-rational parts are satisfied beyond the needs of reason (and thus reason is provided with peace and quiet to pursue its aims, free of clamoring desire and pride), but they are satisfied only as far as justice and unity can be maintained within the state.\footnote{A rational life is led, but the most pleasurable and spirited rational life that can be managed.}

The city is now fully envisioned, and questions about it arise. One question is whether the city is indeed possible, and how it might come about. More to the point, given the unlikelihood of its coming about, since it would require that an absolute ruler \textit{accidentally} turn out to be a philosopher somewhere, is there any political motivation we can draw from this ideal utopia in the world we must live in? The first issue is muddled somewhat by Plato in the course of the whole discussion, for he begins by taking philosophers, the ones who are to rule, to be lovers of the truth and wisdom, but, of course, it turns out that the rulers must not only love wisdom and seek it, but must actually be wise. So the philosophers who are to rule are not folks like Socrates.

\footnote{Justice outside the state is abandoned to support justice within it, in the same way that Engels held a capitalist system will use imperialism abroad to ameliorate the misery of the working class and so forestall revolution. It is worth noting that certain questions are raised by the position of Socrates, who, though wise, wisely abstains from politics. He seems to think that if people were willing to undergo education (the refutations he proposes of common views) they would find their way to correct views about justice and the like, but many in fact resist education, even violently, and that is why he is careful to keep a low profile. So, we might ask, is it permissible, and practicable, to enforce wise views on those who are not suited to learning that they are wise? Is some education, short of the ideal dialectical education, suitable to make citizens tractable to being ruled by the wise? Should people be allowed to rule themselves (democracy) if they are not wise? Might some education short of the ideal philosophical education make people capable of self-rule, perhaps up to a point? The \textit{Republic} is, in the end, about education, and a reflection on how the problems with the ideal, Socratic education, might be resolved in a more practical scheme.}

\footnote{In terms of later discussions, we might say that Plato holds that external goods are not necessary for happiness, that virtue, health of soul, is sufficient for it. But external goods add to happiness, and this is the rationale for the luxurious city. Virtue must be maintained, for without it happiness is impossible, but it might be compromised for the sake of external goods, though only up to the point of diminishing returns. Or perhaps his view is more complex. The individual does best for himself, in the absence of society, by aiming strictly at virtue, and so living a rather ascetic life style. But if the individual is to live a good life he must live it in society, and that means he must live it with individuals, with whom he identifies as a fellow citizen, who do not aim at virtue alone, but also at external goods. So the social nature of human beings forces compromises from the wise man he would not otherwise concede.}
himself, much less folks like his philosophical friends, but the end product of the training in dialectic he envisions, who have actually perceived the Good Itself. That philosophers in the first sense might accidentally come to power in some state is not too far-fetched, but that philosophers in the necessary second sense should do so is surely impossible, unless we are looking at what might happen no more than once in the course of a geological era or two. But, Plato suggests, even if the city will never be actual, the philosopher will consider himself truly the citizen of that perfect city. What does he mean? Perhaps that his loyalty to his own city will be a loyalty to it insofar as it reflects the ideal. So he will see his own city as something intended to develop into the ideal form of a city, and will be faithful to those aspects of it that reflect that city and contribute to its growing into it, and will interpret his city’s good by looking to what will aid that development.

A second question must be raised as soon as we attend to the progress of the larger argument. We constructed this image to clarify what justice is, so where are the virtues to be found in this city? What about the city makes it self-restrained, courageous, wise and just? It is wise because of the knowledge of the Guardians who rule the city. Courage is found in the Auxiliaries—it is the power to preserve the correct opinion concerning what is genuinely to be feared, which is gained from the Guardians. Self-restraint is somewhat paradoxical, for surely a self can only restrain another weaker self, and yet the two are imagined to be the same. Here it turns out that the self has parts, and the wiser and better part restrains the worse. So self-restraint is a sort of harmony in the city, which belongs to the whole in virtue of its parts. Justice, finally, is identified as a matter of each person doing his duty, his own job, and not usurping others’ duties, and so the initial identification of justice with doing one’s duty or giving people what one owes them is upheld.

So is justice found in all the individuals in the state, while courage is only found in the soldiers, self-restraint only in the economic class, and wisdom only in the philosophers? Perhaps something like that could be said if we are talking about the justice, courage, and so on of the state, but not if we mean the justice, courage and the like as they occur in individual persons. The philosophers are wise as a person is wise, but they are also, presumably, courageous, temperate, and just beyond anything the other citizens can muster. But the courage, say, of the state is not expressed in the philosophers, but in the soldiers, even though the philosophers lie behind it, since they are responsible for education, and so the correct opinions of the soldiers about what is noble. Are the soldiers just because they do their job? Well, yes, but they are not just because their souls are balanced in the same way the ideal state is. Their virtue is imposed from without, as it were, by their obedience to the

77Republic 431a. This point about the self also occurs in the discussion of self-restraint in the Charmides, in connection with self-knowledge.
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philosophers. But they express courage, as long as they do their job. They are courageous outwardly, in their behavior, as long as they follow the lead of the philosophers, who are courageous inwardly. Note also that wisdom, knowledge of the good, must be present in the philosophers, else the other virtues are not even possible. Socratic intellectualism is by no means entirely set aside in this account. But we need to look at the virtues proper to individuals more closely.

5. JUSTICE IN THE SOUL

Let no one catch us unprepared or disturb us by claiming that no one has an appetite for drink, but rather good drink . . . the soul of a thirsty person, insofar as he’s thirsty, doesn’t wish anything else but to drink.

Plato, Republic IV, 438a and 439b.

Hence it’s for the sake of what’s good that those who do these things do them . . . Now didn’t we agree that we want [in any particular case], not those things that we do for the sake of something, but that thing for sake of which we do them? . . . we want to do these things if they are beneficial, but if they’re harmful we don’t . . .

Socrates in Plato’s Gorgias 468.

To find the same virtues in the soul as we have found in the ideal city, the analogy between the soul and the city must be developed. How would one identify parts of the soul analogous to the parts of the city? Plato introduces a principle that the same identical thing will not do or undergo opposed things in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing at the same time. He then suggests that the soul sometimes experiences conflicting desires, and so must have different parts responsible for these different desires. To establish this,
Plato must answer the Socratic argument that we desire things only insofar as they are good, so that we do not desire drink when thirsty, but good drink. He insists that there is such a thing as thirst, which is a desire for drink, and which we might experience even when we know that drink is not good for us, and so desire (rationally) not to drink. In addition to rational desires, and the desires related to the senses, such as thirst, there is also a desire that one prosper personally, succeed, win or attain excellence, an egoistic desire that might put us into competition with others. This is found in “the part that loves honor,” Spirit. Once these three parts of the soul have been distinguished we can identify the virtues in a soul as parallel to those in the state.

Now it seems that Plato does not want to give up the Socratic view that no one does wrong willingly in the *Laws* (Book IX), his last work, and unless he changed his mind for some reason, that suggests a problem with the account just given here of *Republic* IV. Maybe this is the best way to adjust that account: the non-rational parts of the soul produces errors in reasoning, drive us toward their preferred actions and goals, but do not in fact have anything like a rational belief that their goals are part of the Good. They just want them, without considering if they are good or not. So two cases arise: (1) genuine weakness of will, in which one does not do what he thinks good, and clearly recognizes that he is acting against his best judgment—this is perhaps relatively rare, or never even occurs at all—and (2) wrong convictions about what is good prompted by one’s non-rational motivations, which do not in fact involve weakness of will, just as Socrates would have held. This would mean that the view of Augustine, that reason is corrupted by the sinful will, is Platonic. In (1) the action performed is not properly speaking desired by the agent, but he does it anyway, against his own judgment. In (2) we do what we think good, but are mistaken, and our mistake may be explained by the deleterious effects of our irrational desires on our thinking. So one never, or rarely, even in cases of weakness of will, desires what he thinks not to be good, it is just that his thinking is corrupted by his desires.\(^79\)

This account of the soul leaves open the question whether one’s self is the soul as a whole, or only the rational part. Plato in the *Phaedo* (and wherever else he considers the soul to be immortal) tends to identify it as the rational part, though clearly most people don’t. All sorts of issues hang on this. One question is whether each part of the soul has its own beliefs and makes its own decisions, as well as having its own desires. Does reason make the final decision what the person believes, after receiving the reports of the senses, say, or are some beliefs established by the sensory part alone, or even the spirit alone, which might have beliefs about what is good or honorable? In that case, there might be conflicts of belief within the soul, as well as conflicts of

\(^{79}\)For this, Christopher Rowe in Benson (2006), “interpreting Plato.”
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desire. Plato tends to identify the self that acts and decides with reason, but he also allows that reason can hand over its powers of decision to the other parts of the soul, as the captain of a ship might let the sailors decide something. Thus each part is capable of autonomous functioning, with its own desires, perhaps its own beliefs, and its own decision-making capacity, and whichever part makes the decision, the decision is attributed to the whole soul and the person. In a properly ordered soul reason can always step in and run things, as a captain can on a properly ordered ship, but in some souls reason is sometimes unable to assert itself, either because of ignorance, so that perhaps the beliefs produced by the senses or adopted by spirit dominate behavior in the absence of rationally produced beliefs, or because of a failure of self-control. Failure of self-control would be due to weakness in spirit, and would occur when it is understood what is good, and spirit accepts its view of the good from reason, but is unable to muster enough honorable passion so that one does that rather than pursuing sensory desires.\footnote{Or, Aristotle suggests, it could occur because spirit is sometimes like an over-zealous servant, who is enthusiastic enough for the ideal, but does not fully understand it. Something like this happened when Ulysses and his son killed all the suitors.}
The strongest desire prevails, and different personalities have different strengths in their rational, sensory, or spirited desires.

Plato now proceeds to argue that it is rational to be just, and irrational to pursue injustice. Several lines of argument are suggested. In the first place, if justice is health in the soul, as appears to be the case, it is reasonable to aim for good health, so that one can lead life as well as possible, for good health is needed for efficient functioning, and without it one cannot lead a good life.\footnote{Republic IV, 444c–445c. See also the Gorgias.} In the second place, the types of state are identified, and parallel to them, the types of human personality. There are five: aristocracy, which is just and good, the victory and honor-loving state (timocracy), the oligarchic state, the democratic state, and tyranny. Plato reviews the constitution and lives of each, and argues that any reasonable person would choose the first after making a comparison among them, because only the first seems to represent rule over oneself.\footnote{Republic VIII and IX, culminating at 580a–c.} In the third place, he claims that the decision of the type of person best qualified to judge should settle the matter, and argues that would be the just person, the philosopher, who would choose the just life.\footnote{Republic IX, 580c–583a.} Finally, he argues that the pleasures of the just, rational life are more real, that is, less mixed with pain, than the pleasures of the
other sorts of life. This last line of argument is Plato’s own take on the hedonistic egoism of Socrates. The first line, concerning the health of the soul, is clear enough from our discussion so far, but it will be useful to explore the others further.

In the second line of argument, Plato derives the kinds of state there might be from a consideration how an aristocracy might decline. So a timocracy emerges from an aristocracy when, due to a failure of education and breeding, the state moves further towards luxury, money-making and the acquisition of land, the Guardians begin to own private property and ally themselves with the rich. The poor lose status, and the Auxiliaries must guard the rich against those that have been enslaved—the unity and harmony of the just state has been destroyed, and there are really two cities, not one, the rich and the poor, engaged in civil war. A timocracy is a kind of oligarchy retaining certain aristocratic elements. Clearly Plato has Sparta in mind. Like many conservatives, he admired the Spartan constitution, and his aristocracy is a purified form of that constitution. A timocratic personality would tend to be obstinate and harsh towards his inferiors, proud, a

84Republic IX, 583b–588a.
85For the discussion of these four lines of argument, see Kraut (1992).
86Plato’s eugenics may seem something of a distraction in his account of his perfect state, and indeed, he takes on board a number of questionable views in his scheme, most especially that virtues and acquired characteristics in general are inherited. These are standard upper-class Greek notions, of course, but Plato also needs the assumption if he is to make his program work, for it is pretty clear that he can’t put everyone through the same education (no family connections etc.) from infancy, since the majority, the economic class, will find this inappropriate, and desire family relations. (Nonetheless, marriages are to be arranged by the Guardians, and a period of isolation from the family in the army is a part of the child’s education among the soldiers and guardians.) So necessarily the Guardians will form a separate breeding pool, even if steps are taken to purge it of those who reveal themselves to be unsuitable, and to admit suitable people into it sometimes from the economic class. If Plato has to face reversion to the mean, and the results of careful selection and educational attainment are not passed on genetically, his state stands little or no chance of surviving for even a few generations before the Guardian class is filled with unsuitable members. This has a connection to the place of women in Plato’s scheme. If one thinks that women contribute to the genetic inheritance of children, as most Greeks did (pace Aristotle) surely something like it is needed. One needs the right women in the genetic pool, and one needs to weed out the wrong ones, and this suggests that Guardian women must have an education very similar to that of the men, and be bred for similar qualities. Given that, it is hard to imagine that they should not be given equality among the Guardians when they succeed in the educational system. But Plato does not seem to imagine that they will very often succeed. He envisions them in nurturing roles (might make good doctors) and insists that they can do physical training, fighting and the like nearly as well as men, but only at 540c does he seem to recognize that a woman may have high enough intellectual capacity. So he does not imagine that women have capacities equal to those of men, and does not argue for women’s rights (or rights at all), though he admits that some women are better at some things than some men. What he does do is argue that there is no special “women’s work,” aside from bearing and nursing children. (And note that Guardian women are to be spared the raising of small children.) Women have the same capacities as men, only, on the average, weaker. So they should hunt with the pack when not nursing puppies, as is done in the case of dogs. This is especially important, perhaps, if women contribute genetically to their children, and acquired characteristics are inherited.

87This is quite clear from reading Xenophon’s Polity of the Spartans (ca. 375). Xenophon notes the disparity between the power of the Spartan state and its size, the way in which education is run by the state, the small number of citizens ruling the mass of serfs who tended the fields, the specialization of the citizens in the military profession, the public mess halls, and the power of a council of elders.
lover of honors and war and physical training, but also of more cultured pursuits, who bases his claim to rule on his warlike abilities. As he gets older, a secret love of money would become more evident in him. Without reason to provide a higher ideal, spirit tends to equate victory and success with what is useful, that is, what provides power, and money clearly provides power more efficiently than most anything else.

It is from a timocracy that oligarchy arises, in which the rich rule directly with the decline of the desire for honor. The mark of this third constitution is a qualification based on wealth for service in the army. Things decline so far here that some citizens have no trade at all, and no means of making a living—they are drones, and they become criminals and beggars. A person with the corresponding temperament looks a lot like a Socratic hedonist. There are drones in him, desires for pleasures for their own sake, without regard to the benefits to be gained in pursuing them, though ostensively he will view only wealth as honorable. He will value a reputation for fairness, and in general he will show self-restraint in the service of security and wealth.

A democracy arises when the drones and the poor assert themselves against the rich, pursuing equality and freedom. A democratic personality will be ostensively devoted to the satisfaction of desires for pleasure, and allow freedom and equality to all his conflicting desires for different pleasures. Within him, as within a democracy, there will be found vicious desires that can only be satisfied through injustice toward others, but neither he nor a democratic state will openly recognize or give control to such desires, focusing instead on the harmless pleasures.

A tyranny arises when a demagogue is able to seize control, and engages in every sort of violence and injustice to get what he wants. A tyrant has completely lost control of his desires, which multiply without bound and can never be satisfied, and he honors even shameful and criminal desires which others suppress, for instance, the desire to harm others for the sake of expressing power and superiority. Since his desires are without bound, so is his need for whatever resources he can obtain from others, by fair means or foul, and so he becomes habitually unjust in his relations to others. A tyrannical character is the sort of person Thrasymachus argued was virtuous. Plato develops each of these constitutions, and each corresponding human character, at considerable length in Republic VIII.

Finally, he turns to a discussion why a just man is better off than a tyrannical, unjust man. The tyrannical soul will be full of disorder, continuously doing things it comes to regret under the impulse of uncontrollable conflicting desires which demand that it commit injustices of every sort to get what it wants. It will continuously be dissatisfied, for its desires will multiply without end, and continually fearful and anxious, not only about satisfying its new desires, but about the conflicts it enters into with others, and the possibility
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of its being punished for its unjust actions or falling into the power of its enemies. So its misery will be due to conflicts within it, which will be strong enough even if the naturally conflicting physically based desires are the only ones it experiences, as well as its conflicts with others. From the standpoint of a state, then, that is, a complex structure of competing goods continuing over time, the good is order and unity, and so the good for a personality viewed in analogy to the state, a personality viewed as a complex structure of competing desires continuing over time, is likewise order and unity, not the momentary maximization of desire satisfaction at the cost of disunity and strife. The second line of argument, then, merges with the first, and the good turns out to be the health of the soul.

This view became enormously influential in the West, as did the gorgeously written passages in the Republic and the other dialogues in which Plato defended it, but a number of doubts might still be raised, for an empirically testable theory of personality and its unity is offered here. First of all, does satisfying bodily desires in fact lead to their multiplication and intensification? Does self-restraint lead to a lessening of desire? Sometimes it does, of course, but when? Doesn’t the suppression of a desire sometimes actually increase it? It would be good to understand better the causes at work here. Plato likens desires to animals, that grow and multiply when fed regularly and left unrestrained by the breeder (by reason and spirit). Surely the metaphor may be misleading. Doesn’t satisfying a desire also tend to extinguish it? Of course, a habit of desire may be formed, but it would be good to look more closely at how this occurs. Addiction also plays a role here, but not all desires are addictive—indeed, strong addiction is exceptional, and the phenomenon needs to be understood.

To be fair to Plato, we should point out that the extreme disorders found in his tyrannical man are not so evident in the democratic man, or his predecessors—Plato does not think it is impossible to pursue bodily desires for their own sake without falling prey to these disorders, and he provides a long history of decline before the tyrannical man develops. This might suggest that a good human life is best lived in, say, a democratic state, with appropriate safeguards to prevent deterioration into a tyranny.

A second issue: what makes it miserable not to satisfy a desire? Is it the opinion that it is a terrible thing to leave it unsatisfied? Might we have many desires, many unsatisfied, and lacking such an opinion, enjoy the ones that are satisfied without suffering much pain from those that are not? Many desires, even if most are unsatisfiable, might then enrich one’s life rather than making it intolerable. Again, Plato may be aware of this, and finds the democratic order attractive because of the variety of pursuits and life styles it allows, though he thinks better taste might not think so well of such variety, and it is the grasping after what one desires, the increasing desperation of life as it declines toward tyranny that accounts for the lawlessness and disorder of the
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In the third place, must there be fears and regrets attached to evil-doing? Can’t we be competitive, willing to inflict suffering on others as a result of winning, and not feel particularly bad about it? There are only a limited number of people we care about, after all, so if we treat our friends well, why need we be made miserable by the consciousness of having hurt others?

In the fourth place, what is the positive content of a good life? Will simple rational unity provide happiness, or do we need rational unity along with satisfaction of desire? Don’t we have to balance the two, sacrificing some unity for satisfaction and vice versa? No conflict at all may be a bad strategy for happiness because one ends up with a boring and meaningless life. And what about the role of conflict and victory in providing meaning to life? Meaning suggests a story line, and the standard good-life plot surely involves conflict, sometimes resolved by victory.²⁸ So a purely rational life that is happy may not be possible—we may need all three parts of the soul to lead the good life, and they may have to be, to some degree, in conflict.

Plato’s initial introduction of the second city, the luxurious city, corresponding to what he takes to be real human psychology, suggests that he is friendly to the suggestion that a good life requires all three parts of the soul to be satisfied, and he certainly thinks some concessions can be made to the bodily desires and the competitive instinct without producing a disordered state of affairs. But Plato also thought they have to cohere together in a single, well-ordered life. So the democratic, oligarchic, timocratic and rational man have to live together, and that requires putting the rational man in charge. To do this benefits everyone. If the community of the Republic is authoritarian, no one is favored by traditional privileges of wealth, birth, or gender, no one’s welfare is ignored and no one is allowed to ignore others’ welfare, and everyone leads a life that is, to some degree, at least, objectively worth living. Moreover, if the best life is led by the Guardians, this is because the Guardians choose their lives most wisely, not because they take from others what the others would like to keep. The Auxiliary, or the oligarchic or democratic man, do not want the life of the Guardian. Each is permitted to pursue what he thinks best, and competition with others that share one’s view of the best is regulated so that no injustice is done. It should be noted that the gap between rich and poor that first leads to a sense of injustice among the poor only emerges with the decline of the rational and just state into a timocracy. Before that, the Guardians prevent the unjust exploitation of some by others. Still, Plato does insist that, of

²⁸ Or, in Plato’s favor, maybe the story line of a good life is always one in which the person gains increasing rational autonomy over time. The victories and defeats are important only insofar as they produce insight and rational self-control. This is more or less the Hegelian view of the meaning of life.
these different lives, the best is that of the rational man, and he finds no room at all for the tyrannical man in a well-ordered state, even though there is room for the others outside the company of Guardians.

Have we identified virtues here, or imitations of virtue? If we hold to Socratic views, it might be argued that virtue is simply knowledge of the good, and is possessed only by the rational part of the soul. The other parts are quasi-virtuous, perhaps, insofar as they follow the lead of the rational part, imitating its natural behavior. So the desires are virtuous if they allow restraint, the spirit is virtuous if it takes its picture of honor from reason, and the whole soul is virtuous if it allows itself to be organized in accord with reason. There is much in Plato’s Middle Dialogues to suggest that our true selves are our rational selves, so this picture of things does play a role in Plato’s thinking. That would mean a reinstatement of Socratic ethics within a more complex psychology, allowing us to characterize with some theoretical adequacy the nature of the imitation of knowledge of the good that constitutes ordinary, human (quasi-)virtue. Among other things, we could return to the view of reason that only the good is desirable, and all other things are desirable under the aspect of the good alone—that would describe reason’s motivational structure, and if the rest of the soul complicates things, well, it makes them less rational as well. What would the duties of reason be towards this more complicated entity, the three-headed soul of Plato? Well, this being has the potentiality of becoming reasonable and good, and so reason would love it, and feel the desire to help it to its own good, the fulfillment of its nature. Does this mean that reason must sacrifice its own aims? Not in the sense that it need allow that the desires and spirit have aims that are intrinsically good, for these parts of the soul are fulfilled only if they become subject to reason, pursuing the real good, which reason understands. Nor in the sense that it need abandon its natural rational love for some other souls to focus on those in its own community, for its final aim will be to bring its soul to the point where it can realize that perfect love for others and abandon all damaging competition, even that moderated by the community. But, of course, the soul must live in a world full of imperfection and injustice, indeed, it must even live with a self full of these things, while working to make it all more rational and perfect whenever it can. So rational people live with, and reconcile to one another, the timocratic, democratic, and oligarchic man within a single community, as an interim arrangement within which they can all be educated to become more rational. If we look at it that way, then Plato’s ideal luxurious state is such a community, and justified as it is a step on the way to the first, purely rational, state, that Socrates preferred and his audience rejected. If such a state cannot be had, then we should aim for a state in which individuals can best be educated to rationality, so perhaps the remaining state within which philosophical investigation is explicitly allowed, the democratic state, would be the right choice. But we should note that a philosophical
education might be available in an oligarchic or timocratic state as well, even if “freedom” is not explicitly valued there as it is in a democratic state, and even if the Greek examples of such states are somewhat less friendly to free thought.

Let us now turn to the third line of argument for the superiority of justice, which depends on the identification of most reliable judge concerning the matter. The argument is developed from a remark attributed to Pythagoras concerning the three sorts of life a person might lead,

Life is like a festival. Just as some come to the festival to compete, some to ply their trade, but the best people come as spectators, so in life the slavish men go grunting for fame and gain, the philosophers for the truth.  

Plato asks here which of the three lives would put one in the best position to judge which of the three is best, assuming that each would opt for the life he has chosen. The philosopher might be chosen on the ground that everyone will be familiar with the pleasures of the body, and philosophers will necessarily have come to know the life of honor in the course of their natural education, but only philosophers will know the pleasures of the intellectual life. In effect, Plato sees the three ways of life as three stages in the development and maturation of a person, the culmination of which is the philosopher’s life. Now it might seem that sometimes a person comes to know the intellectual life and then rejects it for a life of honor or pleasure, indeed, that might seem to be the usual thing for those who come to know the intellectual life as impoverished young people in school. but Plato would reject this suggestion, it seems, because such people, rather than maturing as they make their later choices, decline into vice, betraying their early promise, as we have seen already in his discussion of the evolution of the different sorts of state and the related individual characters. Perhaps he is right, but the defense of his theory of psychological development will require a good deal more than he can provide here to establish that.

In the second place, Plato suggests, the Philosopher is the one concerned with knowledge and the truth, and the instrument of knowing will be most highly developed in the philosopher. Here Plato seems to overreach himself, again. Surely we must ask if the Philosopher will judge his own way of life the best because of his logical skill, or because he recognizes only his own pleasures as worthwhile. To show the first we would have to argue in some extrinsic way that there are reasons to rate his way of life above the rest, reason he would understand while the unskilled logician or researcher would not—that would mean looking around for other

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89 Diogenes Laertes, VIII 8.
arguments and no weight would really fall on the argument at hand at all. But if we can argue that the Philosopher would choose his own way of life without looking abroad in this way, simply from the fact that it is the philosopher that is choosing, then it can certainly be questioned whether he chooses because of his understanding of the real good. Mightn’t there be something about the life of logic and research that leads one to prefer certain goods simply because they are associated with effectiveness in logic and research? One might prefer peace and quiet, even if the evidence was that the best life would be missing these elements, simply because the peaceful life is the one in which logic and research is done best. Perhaps the objective Philosopher, while preferring the philosophical life, would set that personal preference aside, and argue that some other form of life is, all in all, better, even if he, personally, is inclined to pass it up.

Finally, the philosopher, it is argued, will lead the most pleasant life. One reason for this is that the pleasures of the philosopher are not mixed with pain, as are most sensory pleasures rooted in attending to the needs of the body. But Plato does not condemn all sensory pleasure with this charge, for one sort of sensory pleasure not allied with pain in this way is the pleasure of smell—even if most bodily pleasures are illusory, being only relief from pain, and the most intense surely are so, not all are. There is a real bodily enjoyment of the world not tied up in illusion. So we ought to pursue those pleasures not associated by necessity with pain, we might say, those that are not addictive (and so essentially connected with withdrawal symptoms or inclined to drive us, eventually, into excess), and those that do not involve anxiety concerning their loss or the failure to obtain them (and so not associated with grasping and the notion that things are terrible if one does not obtain the pleasure concerned). Such pleasures do not lead the part of the soul that enjoys them to deprive the other parts of the soul of their own appropriate pleasures, and so avoidance of pleasures that are associated with pain increases our pleasures overall in another way as well. But most important, the things that fill the rational soul to give it pleasure, the things it in fact deals with, the Forms, are more real, truer, than those that fill spirit (honor and victory for oneself), and the body (the relief of tensions produced by deprivation, and the experience of imitations of the Forms), and so the life lived by the rational part of the soul is correspondingly more real, and the pleasure that fills the soul is more real when the soul is filled with truer things. The point seems to be that these truer pleasures are more living and active, and involve a truer awareness of what one enjoys. Plato may be right, of course, that one can only appreciate this who has enjoyed the pleasures of philosophy. In fact, he is convinced that one can only appreciate this who has come to know the Forms, and he thinks that anyone who has done this would perceive any turning away from the rational life as backsliding. Once one has seen the Good Itself, no other view is possible. Whatever the plausibility of this view, it clearly
depends on Plato’s account of the Forms, and his view of the knowledge of the Good, and so we must turn now
to metaphysics and epistemology if Plato is to make the case for his ethics. Plato knows this, though, and he
in fact has already discussed these matters when he introduces the arguments for justice in Book IX of the
Republic. Before we judge of the success of his arguments, then, it behooves us to look back at the parts of the
Republic we have skipped in our focus on ethics.

But perhaps we can delay just a moment to look at all this from the point of view of the non-
philosopher, and perhaps also the philosopher in training, who, like Socrates himself, has not completed the
course of dialectic. Plato means to establish that such people ought to hand over the affairs of the state to the
wise philosopher, and, of course, he wants to make it rational for such people to do so. His account of
knowledge and the education of the philosopher is intended to do that. He makes the point with the simile of
the Ship of State, asking us to imagine a vessel at sea with an expert navigator on board, on which the crew
has taken control from the captain. The crew denies that there is any such craft as navigation, and make fun of
the navigator, dismissing him as a sky-watcher and a chatterbox. Of course, if they are to hand over their affairs
to the navigator, as they surely ought to do, for their own welfare, they must be convinced that there is a point
to his star-gazing, that he knows (even if they don’t see quite how he knows) what course they ought to set by
gazing at the stars. If it is to be reasonable for us to entrust ourselves to an expert, we have to know something
about his expertise, so we can see why it is reasonable to take him as an expert. To do this, of course, we might
well look to his education, to see if it is the right sort of thing to lend that expertise. Plato never does tell us
in the Republic what the Good is in sufficient detail so that we can make much use of this knowledge. He does
not make us expert navigators. He presumably does not think anyone knows. But there is a way to learn, he
thinks, and if we can recognize that someone has followed that path, we would do well to entrust her with our
affairs. For the non-philosopher who does not intend to pursue the course of dialectic described, this is one
point of the middle books of the Republic.

6. JUSTICE, LIVING WELL, AND THE FORM OF THE GOOD

… the only thing I say I understand is the art of love…

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90 Republic VI 487e–489c.
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The central books of the Republic argue that a defense of the rationality of justice can be mounted successfully only if we introduce separated forms, in particular, the Form of the Good. The Guardians representing the rational soul in the state can only do their job properly, Plato thinks, if their education brings them to know the Good Itself, as opposed to the good as it occurs in any particular context, or as it occurs in sensibles. The first stage of this education is devoted to character, not intellectual attainment. It is only those who have been selected, at rather an advanced age, on the basis of their good character who are to receive an intellectual education. Mathematics is used to identify intellectual ability, and those who have an aptitude and liking for it are marked, because they have the natural instinct for abstraction and idealization needed to begin to know the Forms. Only those who go on to understand the Forms and their separation from sensibles, and to view at last the Form of the Good Itself, are suited to rule the state as Guardians. This is in part because only they are in a position to understand that only a just life is worth living.

Knowledge of the Form of the Good does the same work for Plato the afterlife story does for Socrates, with the advantage, Plato thinks, that the separation of the Forms is knowable, as the Socratic story is not. Indeed, Plato runs the two stories together in the Republic and his later dialogues, so that one can easily see that he might intend the afterlife story as a mythical presentation of the point made in the doctrine of the separation of the Forms. The Form of the Good, that is, rational order, is guaranteed to lie behind all the natural processes of the world, for the world can only be grasped, understood and explained in terms of this rational order, and so awareness of this order and participation in it are sufficient in themselves to guarantee a good life and keep one from harm. Proving the separation of the Forms and the centrality of the Form of the Good has the same effect as proving the existence of an omnipotent, perfectly good God who runs the universe. Understanding the Platonic Forms from the ethical side is a matter of grasping how this is so. Participation in the order that is the Form of the Good is the health of the soul, but more, the contemplation of the Good is itself a high good, the root of all good. The good life is a matter of the right kind of experience or awareness, joined to

91 Translated by Nehamas and Woodruff, Plato (1997). Like much else in the dialogue the statement poses a puzzle. Probably Plato meant to imply that real, complete knowledge of the Forms is not possible to human beings, but we might understand the love of the Forms, the life of the ever incomplete, always developing Eros, seeking the Good, detailed by Diotima.

92 In later Platonism this contemplation of the Good is often identified as a mystical experience of some sort, a direct perception of the separated Form. But that interpretation of it is not demanded by the argument, and even seems to be ruled out by much of what Plato says about knowing the Forms. There may be no direct perception of the Forms at all, under any conditions, as
an activity that makes sense. So to live well is to be aware of the fundamental order and goodness of the universe, and even more of Goodness itself, on which the goodness of the universe is established, and to understand the world is likewise to be aware of the Good. To be knowable is to participate in the Good. To live is to participate in the Good. Thus Platonic metaphysics steps in and provides a secure basis for the Socratic faith that the good man cannot suffer evil.

These notions are rooted in Pythagorean thought. In the last part of the Gorgias93 we begin to feel the Pythagorean presence, with a reference to the question borrowed from Euripides, “who knows if life is really death, and death life?”, and the image of the uninitiated in Hades carrying water in a sieve, like the seeker of addictive pleasures who can never be satisfied. This is all attributed to some clever Sicilian or Italian, ending with a judgment myth involving reincarnation, and the observation that forgetfulness is a defect in the soul. The message is surely that the Pythagorean doctrines will have to be brought to bear on the question if Socrates is to defend the rationality of justice, though the Pythagorean views are only hinted at, and the views presented are as close to traditional notions as can be managed. In the Meno the game is more in the open, with a direct reference to those priests who teach the immortality and transmigration of the soul.94 One becomes like the god—originally, among the Pythagoreans, one comes to live among the gods, after passing through Hades with the passwords given to the initiate—but now this is interpreted as becoming like the Forms, ordered and wise and virtuous.95

Here I propose to discuss the role of our knowledge of the Form of the Good in the development of a mature human personality for Plato, as it is worked out in his Symposium, leaving consideration of the role of the Forms in knowledge and explanation, and the proof of the separation of the Forms, and thus much of the central books of the Republic, for later sections.

The Symposium is Plato’s most literary dialogue, and to draw the philosophy from it requires that we penetrate a veil of symbolism and allegory, much as the Good itself is known by us only by penetrating a veil we shall see, and in that case contemplation of the Good would be the reflection through dialectic that leads one to an understanding of the Good and its place in the world, and the relation of everything else to the Good.

93 Gorgias 492e.

94 Meno 81ab.

95 Compare Theaetetus 176b. Irwin notes that Socrates seems to reject the notion that virtue is some sort of knowledge or craft in Meno 78, arguing that justice is not to be sought for the sake of some other good outside justice, such as pleasure, but for its own sake.
of appearances in which it is realized. Socrates is attending a drinking party to celebrate the recent victory of a tragedy of Agathon, a playwright friend. The guests decide to drink only in moderation (everyone has a hangover from the previous night) and to entertain themselves with a series of speeches in praise of the god Eros, Love, dismissing the professional entertainers that had been arranged. 96

The first speaker, Phaedrus, a wealthy young man devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, though not given to vice, praises love for its effects. Love leads us to pursue the good (or rather, whatever is held to be good within the lover’s society). Love of our fellows leads us to pursue this vision of the good out of shame of doing otherwise, for those who love wish to be worthy of their beloved. There is something defective in this love, though, for a death-love motif (so prevalent in stories of romantic love in the Middle Ages and after) creeps into his discussion. The romantic love referred to here is rooted in the pursuit of pleasure, and just as pleasure is at the same time a deprivation, and so can never lead to complete satisfaction, so this love is at once life and death.

Pausanias, a notable general and a political and military hero, speaks second, and he takes note that not all love is praiseworthy. But Pausanias, too, though he distinguishes a heavenly and an earthly love, raises no challenge to the common opinion about the good, except to insist that the noble or fine (kalos) ought to be the aim, rather than money or pleasure. Pausanias represents the man dominated by the spirited part of the soul, so that we have advanced from mere animal love, the sort of love pursued by a person devoted to sensory desires and pleasures, to the love characteristic of a person that might make a good Guardian in the Republic. This makes the heavenly love of Pausanias the sort of love rooted in the pursuit of honor, in living up to an internalized ideal. Hence women are no longer the object of love, nor even boys if too young, but young men who both exemplify the ideal of manly nobility, and can be benefitted by being taught to be noble. The ideal is largely military-political, with no notion that it should be specified by reason. It could easily degenerate to a mere pursuit of power. And the connection between love and war, love and death, remains. 97

96 There seems to be some link to Xenophon’s Symposium here, for in that work the dancing girls play a conspicuous part, and no one but Aristippus, known for his disapproval of pleasures, and kidded a bit for it by Socrates, refrains at all from imbibing. It seems likely that Plato is letting us know that the discussion here is to be of a different sort, addressed perhaps to another audience, than that in Xenophon’s portrayal of Socrates. Xenophon knows nothing of the Forms, of course.

97 For a brilliant discussion of this connection, revealing a deep consideration of Plato and a genuine experience of war, see J. Glenn Gray, The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle (1959), Chapter 3. Interestingly in connection with the dialogue up to this point is the discussion of the sorts of friendship in Plato’s Lysis, which correspond closely to these three sorts of love. We shall see that the discussion of friendship in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics develops the same theme yet further. Thus far the idea of the two sort of love developed in fact parallels the course of Xenophon’s Symposium, but the rest of the speeches have no parallel there.
The third speech is made by Eryxymachus, a physician and a scientist, who treats love as a cosmic principle responsible for the world’s holding together—the physical sciences represent a first step on the way to a grasp of the Forms,\(^8\) and so his speech represents the early phases of the education of the Guardian, in which the role of harmony in nature is learned in preparation for a consideration of the Forms themselves. Love produces a harmony of opposites (Pausanius had made love something that occurred between like persons), and Eryxymachus makes a great deal of the power of love, but at no point does he speak of the good. All his explanations are physical.

Aristophanes’s speech deepens Eryxymachus’s conception by adding the notion of an end, which is a life relating one to every part of the whole. Aristophanes was a comic playwright, so a satire was to be expected from him. He is elsewhere identified as a particular friend of Socrates, and so it is also to be expected that his satire might have some deeper philosophical point. He tells a story how in the beginning we were each initially united to our partner physically, but the Gods, fearing our power, split us in two, and so we spend our lives looking for our other half, and experience the deepest bliss of love when we find it. The story rehabilitates love between the sexes, which had been viewed as rather inferior by Pausanias, though the purely masculine (or feminine) relation is also allowed legitimacy as well, for sometimes the original person that was split in two consisted of two male or two female halves. The original state of things corresponds to the perfect Good of the Forms, and the jury-rigged reunion of the shattered whole represents a whole composed from related parts, the kosmos imitating the Form of the Good. What is added to Eryxymachus’s account is the notion of the good, which the kosmos only imitates as well as it can in its divided state. Love is a special helper of humans here, not of the Gods, who have not fallen from the perfect good and so have no need of him. This all reflects a rather sophisticated Platonic point of view, but Aristophanes sticks close to his figure, and makes the object of love simply the other person, or life with the other person, rather than the Good Itself. Aristophanes’s profession is the production of caricatures, and probably we are to take his account here as a caricature, but a serious one, of the truth, as the Form of the Good is caricatured, perhaps, in sensible things.

Agathon’s speech comes next, and attempts to praise love for its own sake as well as its effects. We should compare the request that Socrates praise justice for its own sake in *Republic* II. Agathon knows how to tell opinions of experts about the good from the common opinion,\(^9\) but he still has no inkling of the world of

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\(^8\)Apparent, for instance, in *Phaedo* 96-99.

\(^9\)Symposium 194ab.
Forms, and so takes a mere imitation of the real and perfect good for the good itself. In praising love for its own sake he, in effect, praises pleasure as the (rational) standard of the good. His stance is that of Socrates in the *Protagoras*, where he takes pleasure to be the measure of the good, and the only thing good in itself. So he advances beyond the earlier speakers in taking the Good to be good in its own right, not in relation to the one who seeks it, but fails in identifying the good with something found in the sensible world, for he knows nothing of the separated Forms. Plato took this to be Socrates’s actual view, and that is why Socrates here presents a better view, next, not as anything he has figured out on his own but as something taught him by Diotima. The better view is in fact Plato’s. Agathon even attempts an account of the virtues reflecting Socrates’s account, though for Wisdom Agathon the poet substitutes Poetic Genius, which he makes coordinate with creative power. This hints that wisdom is perhaps the real creative power in the end.

Socrates’s speech falls into three parts. He begins with some introductory remarks bearing on what Agathon has said. He makes a reference to Gorgias that seems intended to remind us of the *Gorgias*, in which we have seen Socrates’s views on justice are strongly criticized, and only preserved by some implausible moves. There may well be a suggestion that Agathon’s speech actually gets further than Socrates’s views in the *Protagoras*, the point being that Agathon takes love itself (here, concern for others) to be somehow pleasurable, or that he thinks we can take pleasure in the happiness of others for its own sake because of love. In either case he can account for the virtue of justice much better than Socrates can, since Socrates takes an egoistic position in the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*, holding that men only value, and should value only, their own pleasure for its own sake.

There follows a dialectical exchange with Agathon, which is repeated between Socrates and Diotima. Socrates’s first point is that the lover does not long to love, or find loving itself a pleasure, for it is painful when he does not have what he loves. The pleasure, or real good for its own sake, must lie not in the loving, then, but in possessing what is loved. His second point is that love is to be distinguished from other forms of wanting inasmuch as it involves longing for what one does not have, or possess fully. Here we should remember the make-shift character of sexual union in the story of Aristophanes. We never possess the Good fully in the

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100 It is interesting, and surely no accident, that higher wisdom here is presented first by a fool, and then by a woman. One can only go so far with manly warrior-strength in this business. At some point masculine self-assertion has to be superseded by something else, which the manly self-assertor, at least, can only see as foolish, effeminate, or reflective of an artistic temperament, uninvolved in serious affairs. There is another option Plato does not exploit, but which is taken by Christianity, and views maturation and rationality itself as possibly the mistake—the childish. But Plato views the childish as the immature and pre-rational, and so places it beneath the manly view of things. The victory of women and fools over pompous and over-bearing men is, of course, a principle motif in comedy in general.
temporal world that only imitates the form, good itself with no admixture of its opposite, just as we never fully possess a loved person (that is, we never live the life of that person, or become united to that person).

Finally the climax of the discussion is reached as Socrates recounts the teachings of the priestess Diotima. First she says that Eros is a *daimon*, not a God or anything good in its own right, putting the result of the interchange between Socrates and Agathon in symbolic terms. Love is an intermediary between a human being and the good, that somehow leads the person to the good. In particular, note that love, like the temporal world he connects to the forms, is always found between being and non-being. He is between the wise and the ignorant, just as the person with a well-tested, true opinion is between the wise and the ignorant. To have a well-tested, true opinion about what is good is not enough, one must also love it to become virtuous (in the half-and-half way that humans can be virtuous).

Then Diotima gives an account of the temporal and imperfect beings whom love connects to the eternal and perfect Good, conceived as the Beautiful, and what they would gain from possession of the Good. They would become happy, and everyone loves the good and desires to be happy. Not wholeness, but the Good is what we properly love, and we desire to possess it for ourselves, forever.

She suggests that love is the desire to beget upon the beautiful. This reflects our longing to possess the good forever, and so to be immortal. Immortality is impossible to us, of course, unless we accomplish immortality through generation. Indeed, even during the lifetime of a single person survival from moment to moment necessarily involves a continual replacement of parts that no longer work right with new parts, so that a semblance to the original is maintained. So given the Heraclitean character of natural things, they can only last indefinitely through reproduction, by which the offspring replace their parents, carrying on the same good life their parents did. Now physical reproduction involves a man and a woman, but there is also a production within oneself of virtues, and a reproduction of these through training and teaching in others. So there is a

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101 Symposium 202e. At this point it might be well to pursue further the comparison of Plato’s *Symposium* to Xenophon. Of course the speeches of Diotima, as well as the dialectical exchange, are missing from Xenophon. If we take Xenophon to be presenting a more genuinely Socratic point of view, his points seem to be these: There are two sort of beauty, that of the body, and that of the soul, and the truest lover loves the beautiful soul. As for beauty of the body, perhaps the truest such beauty would be utility, and a great joke is made of this as Socrates argues that he is the most beautiful in the company because his nose is capable of bringing a broader range of odors and more air, his mouth capable of taking in more food at a single bite, and so on. Despite his victory in argument, acknowledged by all, he is voted down by the jury, perhaps indicating that this sort of love is ruled by bodily passions, not reason. The talk turns to love of the soul afterwards, which is identified as the more divine love, and it is hinted that love of the beauty of the body somehow reflects the love of the soul, that is, of proportion and the like, that is, of virtue, which is the reason it seems to ignore pure utility. Xenophon often presents Socrates as a lover, intensely interested in love, but a lover of the soul (this being associated with a love of young men, as in Plato), without bodily passions to interfere with the souls’ intercourse, and is quite hard on those involved in a physical passion for boys. The love of Callias and Autolycus is presented as an example of the higher love, as is the love of Antisthenes for Socrates, which is without any hint of physical attraction.
natural advance toward a grasp of the beautiful itself, beginning with a love of a particular beautiful body, and then continuing with a love for beauty in general, and then a love for the beauty of souls, and so for the beauty preserved in laws and institutions, until one comes to a love of Beauty Itself. This last love and the contemplation of Beauty itself makes one truly immortal, apparently inasmuch as one dwells in a timeless contemplation of Beauty Itself.

But this is not just a discussion of human love, for even irrational brutes are brought into the picture—rather it is a discussion of the way in which the temporal world imitates the eternal. We should be reminded of the *Timaeus*, in which Time provides a moving image of the eternal—the natural world is a moving image of Beauty Itself. Human beings, capable of knowledge, have new ways of “begetting” that irrational animals do not, for we can continue our lives by teaching others to live like us, imparting to them our conception of the good. Hence we seek to continue *our* lives and *our* possession of the good. If we can bring them to live the good life we extend our own life. Thus the inadequate explanation of our rational concern for other’s welfare in Agathon is replaced by a better account.

Lastly, Diotima broaches the subject of the Forms. This part of the story is modeled on the Eleusynian Mysteries, the enactment of a sacred wedding, with the revelation of the Form of the Beautiful (the Good Itself) in the place of the showing of the sacred objects. Gazing on the true Beauty makes one for the first time truly virtuous, for in gazing on true Beauty one comes to love the Good Itself for its own sake. Love of the individual is but an expression of love of the Form, and this would mean that love of *oneself* is an expression of love of the Form in a truly virtuous person. One would love oneself only as an instance of a good person, then, and others equally good one would love equally. The business of wishing to continue one’s possession of the good can now be seen as a less adequate expression of the Form within us, one not resting on full knowledge of the Good Itself, and not fully comprehensible in itself, if we do not take the Forms into the account.

It is interesting that everyone applauds Socrates at the end, awarding him the victory, except for Aristophanes. Aristophanes, of course, has a good grasp of the Theory of Forms, and perhaps he thinks it has not been fully enough incorporated into the picture. Plato, perhaps, wants us to reflect on how it might be so incorporated. The point, we may conjecture, given the drift of Aristophanes’s speech, is that the Form of the Good is only imitated properly by the whole *kosmos*, not by some individual within it that can only reveal one aspect of it. So we must, if we love the Good for its own sake, love others and wish to live with them, for they reveal aspects of the Good we cannot reveal in ourselves, and there are aspects of the good which emerge in our common life which cannot emerge if we live in separation from one another. We can only realize the good
cooperatively with others. Perhaps he finds a little too much individualism in Socrates’s speech, then. True beauty and worth is only participated in by the individual inasmuch as he shares in the whole.

Here we can find an answer to what might seem a problem in the Republic: Why is it that the Guardians choose to govern the city rather than withdrawing from it to form their own, ideal political community? Is it in their interest to do so? It is in their interest to live in a well-governed city, of course, a point Plato makes, but they could live in a well-governed city if they isolated themselves from those less wise than they—they apparently accept the duty of governing the city for the sake of the Good Itself, or the good of others, not their own good. The Crito would suggest that they recognize that they owe something to the state for their education, and so are obliged to conform to its laws as long as they do not require them to do injustice. But ruling the imperfect state contributes to justice rather than harming it. So the plight of the philosopher returning to the cave to teach his erstwhile fellows is the plight of Socrates facing his condemnation. Indeed, in the Crito, one central argument Socrates presents for remaining in prison is that he should fail as a teacher and a witness to justice if he made his escape. Above all he must present a good example. The argument of the Symposium suggests that the philosopher will seek to realize the good in the world as much as possible, not only in their own lives. They will be especially interested in education, perhaps, because they want to realize the good in human life, as their mode of reproduction, as it were, by leading those who are able to the highest and noblest life. The Guardians are motivated by love of their companions rather than self-interest, but this genuine altruistic love must be distinguished from love of those one identifies with, which is simply an extension of self-love. Hence the elimination of family connections for the Guardians. Plato is no Confucian, viewing the family as the place where the virtues are formed. It is for him the place where true love of the Good and of others because of their potential for the good is undermined.102

In an artful coda, Plato describes the arrival of Alcibiades and his speech in praise of Socrates (who, of course, represents Love, for it is he who connects us to wisdom). The arrival of Alcibiades is the ribaldry (the

102 And so it is that in the Republic Plato argues for the destruction of the family as far as possible, to prevent the development of special family loyalties, and to draw on the power of love for one’s offspring, parents, and sexual partner to further the unity of the community, at least among the Guardians, who hold the political power. He also expects that among the guardians the sexual desire will be sublimated to a love of knowledge, and the Good. Aristotle, in Politics II 1-5, finds this aspect of Plato’s politics indefensible, for one thing, because it would not be possible to implement, and for another, because the power of family connections depends upon their narrowness, and could not be retained if they were watered down to extend to the whole community. For this feature of the Republic’s program, and its connection to the discussion of eros elsewhere in Plato, particularly in the Symposium, its place in the education of the guardian, and a good deal else of interest concerning sex and love in its political dimensions, see the excellent discussion of Paul Ludwig, “Eros in the Republic,” Ch. 8 in Ferrari, ed. (2007). Plato’s program in the Republic is developed, it appears, like much else, from features of the Spartan constitution.
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expression of love in its lower forms) accompanying the secret consummation of the sacred wedding.  

Alcibiades himself is a walking tragedy, a superbly capable man who knows what is good, but, due to his disordered soul, is unable to pursue it. He debases love of the Good itself, and a love for and desire to share Socrates’s life, because he sees Socrates as an example of the Good. In him this love is reduced to a carnal desire for Socrates and mere admiration without the will to participate in the good life himself. All things are reduced to disorder and the commitment to drink only in moderation is abandoned under Alcibiades’s influence, but Aristophanes and Agathon, virtuous men, remain with Socrates far longer than the others, sharing in his life, and so in the good, that is, discussing philosophy. While the revelers engage in their coarse celebrations, the sacred wedding itself, off to one side and in private, is once more consummated.

7. THE SEPARATION OF THE FORMS

After the systems we have named came the philosophy of Plato, which in most respects followed these thinkers, but had peculiarities that distinguished it from the philosophy of the Italians. For, having in his youth first become familiar with Cratylus and Heraclitean doctrines (that all sensible things are ever in a state of flux and there is no knowledge about them), these views he held even in later years. Socrates, however, was busying himself about ethical matters and neglecting the world of nature as a whole but seeking the universal in these ethical matters, and he fixed thought for the first time on definitions; Plato accepted his teaching, but held that the problem applied not to any sensible thing, but to entities of another kind—for this reason, that the common definition could not be a definition of any sensible thing, as they were always changing. Things of the other sort, then, he called Ideas, and sensible things, he said, were apart from these, and were all called after these; for the multitude of things which have the same name as the Form exist by participation in it. Only the name ‘participation’ was new; for the Pythagoreans say that things exist by imitation of numbers, and Plato says they exist by participation, changing the name.


103 The custom is this: guests wait outside until the wedding is consummated in private and then a signal is given to them that the deed has been accomplished, and they break into rejoicing, drunken rejoicing, of course. The consummation has been accomplished in secret in the dialogue, during the last part of the discussion with Diotima, with its reference to the souls’ union with the Form of the Good.

104 Translated W.D. Ross. Compare *Metaphysics* XIII 4, 1078b9–32, which asserts explicitly that Socrates did not separate the Forms from sensibles.
The view concerning the forms occurred to those who espoused it because they were convinced of the truth of the Heraclitean arguments that all perceptibles are always in flux, so that if there is to be knowledge and intelligence about anything, there must be certain other enduring natures besides the perceptibles.

Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XIII 4, 1078b12–17.\(^{105}\)

Nor again will the beautiful appear in the guise of a face or hands or any other portion of the body, nor as a speech or knowledge, nor as being somewhere in some other thing—as, for example, in a living thing is in the earth or in the heavens or in anything else; rather, it is itself by itself and with itself, while all the other beautiful things participate in it in such a way that, though all of them are coming to be and perishing, it neither increases nor diminishes, and is in no way affected.

Plato, *Symposium*, 211a5-b5.\(^{106}\)

From this exalted poetry, we must now descend to tedious argument if we are to make out Plato’s right to look forward to knowledge of the Form of the Good. Why suppose that such a separated Form exists at all?\(^{107}\) We have seen that Socrates held piety to be a certain ideal, applicable to one’s actions, to which a pious person is committed. This ideal includes within itself the ideal of a conscious commitment to itself—that is, to be pious one must conceive the ideal of piety and commit oneself to it. Thus, piety is itself pious, that is, its concept includes conformity with itself. This ideal of piety is found in any number of different persons, and in their actions, and is always the same and has the same effects, wherever it is found. Pious people are committed to, and so share, the same ideal. This piety is what experts know and define when they understand what piety is, and they know about pious actions, and the characteristics they have in consequence of the piety in them, only in virtue of their expert knowledge what piety is. But none of this implies that the Forms, these ideals people share, have any existence separately from the persons who conceive or construct them. Socrates thought that one can speak and think of piety without mentioning or thinking of particular pious things, but he did *not* think that piety *existed* separately from the things it was found in—its being depends on the being of the particulars it inhabits. A person must conceive the ideal for it to exist, and someone must commit himself

\(^{105}\) Translation from Palmer (1999) 34.

\(^{106}\) Translated in Devereux (1994).

\(^{107}\) For a logically elegant introduction to Plato’s theory of the Forms, see Wedberg (1955). I begin here with a consideration of Plato’s views as presented in the *Meno, Phaedo* and *Republic*. 
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to it, and try to act in accordance with it, for it to take its place in the person’s actions. Persons pursuing piety, not piety by itself, bring it about that actions are pious. Socrates also thought that one could become acquainted with piety only through acquaintance with piety in particular pious things, perhaps with the conception of piety held by some particular person or the piety revealed in his actions.\textsuperscript{108}

To move to a rather different case, Plato accepted the notion that there are, in some cases, ‘characters’ rather like these Socratic Forms to be found in particulars.\textsuperscript{109} So he confesses that in addition to the Odd Itself, the number three is odd and can in no way fail to be odd. It has the character of oddness perfectly, and this character, it seems, is \textit{in} the number, and depends on the number’s being for its being.\textsuperscript{110} So oddness exists by being in the Odd itself, the Form, but also by being in the number three. Similarly, a finger is a finger perfectly, and in no way not a finger, and so the perception of a finger does not suggest to the intelligence that the Form of Finger exist separately from its participants, for the finger’s fingerhood is found perfect and entire in the finger, and has no need of the Form of Finger to support its existence.\textsuperscript{111} Piety, in the same way, is to be found in pious actions, though the character of piety found in a pious action, it appears, does not rule out the action’s being impious in some respect.\textsuperscript{112} But Plato came to think that there were also Forms separated entirely from particular sensible things, that is, not found at all in them, so that neither their being nor our knowledge of them depends on particular sensibles. Sensible things imitate these forms, or ‘share’ or ‘participate’ in them,

\hspace{1.0in}\textsuperscript{108}See my account of Socrates’s view here in Chapter IV, pp. 65–75.

\hspace{1.0in}\textsuperscript{109}See \textit{Phaedo} 102b–103e, and the discussion of these passages in Devereux (1994).

\hspace{1.0in}\textsuperscript{110}\textit{Phaedo} 103e–104b.

\hspace{1.0in}\textsuperscript{111}\textit{Repulic} VII 523c-e.

\hspace{1.0in}\textsuperscript{112}Of course, numbers greater than one are either perfectly odd in all respects, or perfectly even in all respects. Many actions would not be perfectly pious, but such actions might have perfect piety in them, but a piety hindered in some way by a contrary character also present in them. The piety in the actions must be perfect, else they are not pious at all, for they do not conform to the ideal of piety, but to some other, perhaps similar, ideal. One should also note that a pious action “falls short of piety” not, as it were, on a scale of piety, getting a score less than a ten and so turning out only imperfectly pious, but rather because it is also impious in some way. But the finger is not also not a finger, even if it is an imperfect finger. It is not falling short of perfection, but the comprevence of opposites, that is the issue.

\hspace{1.0in}\textsuperscript{113}I hesitate to say “existence,” for that might suggest Forms exist in the way that cats do, have a location, say, or are participants in events. But the Forms are, as they must be to be what they are. For a Form, it seems, to exist or be is to be something (some \textit{individual sort} of thing) rather than to be a particular, sensible individual.
and if they have some character in them this is in virtue of this participation.\textsuperscript{114} The number three is odd through imitation (a perfect imitation) of the Odd itself, which is not in the number three, though the character of the Odd is. This suggests that for a predication to be true of a sensible individual is really for the individual to share in a form, not for the individual to have a character in it which cannot be there unless the individual in question is there to have it. When we say it has such a character we are doing nothing more than indicating that it participates in the Form, or, if the character is something other than mere imitation of the Form, it is presence is caused by imitation of the Form. Of course, the individual must exist to share in a Form, so if we identify the sharing in the Form with the character, the character depends on the individual it is in for its being—but the Form does not.

This not only presents a different picture than Socrates did what it is for something to share in a Form, it also assigns a different scope and function to the theory of Forms than Socrates assigned to it. Socrates was interested in ethical Forms, ideals which a person might reasonably strive to live up to, and his theory, if it amounts to that, concerns those ideals, not qualities and characteristics of things in general. But Plato wanted to extend the theory to mathematical properties such as length and equality, and that suggested either that mathematics was conceived and invented by human beings, just as ethical ideals were, or else that ethical ideals were objective and independent of human conception of them, just as mathematics is. He found the second view most attractive, of course, since he was concerned to establish the objectivity of ethical ideals, and even their control over the events of nature, contradicting the Sophistic view that they were a matter of human invention. But how could he apply the same theory to these two cases? It would be reasonable to do so if it were a correct theory of what it was for intelligible characteristics to be predicated of sensibles, in general.\textsuperscript{115} But how could he argue for such an ambitious theory, to get his modification of Socrates’s views concerning ideals?

He felt he could prove a separated Form for a character found in a thing in some cases, but unfortunately

\textsuperscript{114}It is, I claim here, pressing the metaphors here too hard to say that Plato identified three different realities, the thing with the character, the character, and the Form with the character, but we shall see this reading of the view adopted in later thinkers reflecting on Plato and Aristotle, particularly those who desired to reconcile them. It is certainly not a mere metaphor, though, to refer to Forms and their participants, for Plato is quite explicit about this, and makes it bear a considerable weight of argument, as though he meant it as a theory rather than a figure of speech, and there are no more fundamental entities in terms of which we can explain away the Forms. Indeed, the point of the separation of the Forms is to avoid explaining them away in terms of talk merely about the individuals participating in them.

\textsuperscript{115}As a matter of fact, he does not advance the Theory of Forms as a theory of predication in general, as we shall see below when we look at the later dialogues, nor even as a theory of predication involving sensibles in general, as we shall see below when we look at the \textit{Timaeus}.
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the proof did not work for all. In cases where he could not make the proof work, for instance, the case of the character of oddness in three, he proposed his theory as the best, rather than the only possible, explanation for what was going on, nonetheless. In the cases where he thought he could offer a proof, his argument for separation proceeds in two stages. First, Plato demonstrates, what was also clear to Socrates, that the Form of Piety, say, and the sensible particulars in which it is supposedly found, are both pious, but not in the same way, and are different things. Nor is the Odd the number three. Nor is the Equal this equal line. This follows from the fact that the number three and the line have characteristics other than those that belong to oddness and equality. This is clear because there are other, different, odd things, the number five, for instance, and a square can be equal, but is not a straight line. So something irrelevant to oddness and equality is found in the number three and the equal straight line, which differentiates them from five and an equal square.

One might object that the Form of oddness too has characteristics irrelevant to its oddness, for instance, its being a Form, and its being only one form, and distinct from (not identical to) other forms. We shall look into this more closely in discussing Plato’s later dialogues, where he begins to find possible problems in it, though in the end he thinks it can (and must) be granted—the only alternative being to eschew all further theoretical remarks about Forms. But there is an additional, and more serious problem with sensible particulars, for sensibles not only include more than what they are, but also inevitably have characteristics that conflict with what they are, with the definition of piety, say, while the Form of Piety, Piety Itself, must fit the definition perfectly, always, necessarily and in every respect. The pious action is, in some respects, impious, but piety is never impious in any respect at all. So the particular sensibles have opposed qualities in them. No sensible action is necessarily or always pious, in every way, but is also in some ways impious, from some angle, as every pair of sensible equals is unequal in some respect. Piety, like equality, belongs to a thing considered this or that respect, and a sensible is just involved in too many relationships to too many things to score as pious or equal on every count.

Given these assumptions, Plato brings home the need for the separation of Forms by arguing that a Form has to be a perfect paradigm that cannot be misapplied by us. The sense in which Socrates accepted this for piety, we have seen. Take the Form of the Equal. Plato argues in the Phaedo that an equal sensible thing, say a stick, which can be seen to be equal, is never equal without qualification. It will be equal, perhaps, in length, but not in weight, to one stick, but not another. Even if it turned out to be equal in every way it can

116 After all, why introduce two different sorts of explanation for what seems a common phenomenon if there is no need?
be, the stick would not be necessarily equal—it could become unequal if it were to change a little. But the Equal Itself cannot be unequal in any way (just as piety itself is impious in no way), otherwise it could not reliably serve as a standard by which we can judge if other things are equal or not, since in using it we might seize on characteristics belonging to it which conflict with equality in making our comparisons. We would have to know beforehand somehow, not just which aspects of an imperfect paradigm were relevant to our employment of it (ignoring the color of the yardstick, for instance), but under which of its relevant aspects it was to be rejected entirely as paradigm, because under them it exemplified its opposite (ignoring the lengths found in the yardstick that are not a yard long, its width and depth, for instance). This is too much to ask unless we have some other paradigm at hand using which we can sort out the respects in which our sample is equal, and the respects in which it is not equal. This work has to be done, and can only be done by resorting to a less confusing paradigm. So we can only use an imperfect paradigm if we have a perfect one to govern our use of it, and that means that there must be perfect paradigms, which we know, of every quality we can truly identify in a thing.

One can make essentially the same argument in another way, by considering our attention to something like equality. The crucial point is that we are capable of attending to equality, in order to say what it is, what follows from it, and so on. Can we do this by attending to equal things, without attending to a separated Form of Equality? Well, only if we attend to the right aspect of these things, since if I’m attending to an equal cat, say, and consider the cat’s love of tuna, I am not attending to its equality. So if I’m attending to, talking about, thinking of, a sensible thing in order to attend to equality, I must separate out for myself the equality in it from its other characteristics. We might forget about whether paradigms are involved at all, then, and simply ask how someone thinks about the equal. If it is by attending to the equal, she must restrict her attention to the equal, ignoring other aspects of whatever example she may be working with. How can she do that? At some point one might say that we just do. But if that feels inadequate and we want to know how we do it,117 there is a temptation to trace this back to the capacities of the objects of thought. It must be that equality is the sort of thing that, if you attend to it, that cannot be considered as or mistaken for anything else. It is a direct object of thought, directly attended to, not something thought of or attended to by thinking of or attending to some other thing first. It is, as it were, an unmistakable object of thought. Therefore it contains in no way any

117This is the crucial move in the argument, of course. If we simply say, “this is something we can do, and we don’t know how we do it, but we do,” that seems right. But surely there must be a way in which it is done, even if I am unaware of what that is, and just do the thing, unconsciously. The right answer here would be that there are no doubt many ways in which it can be done, and it is done in different ways on different occasions—how many ways are there in which one can measure a length? But we want the one way so that we can understand the capacity, the one way to which all the others can be reduced.
inequality.

One might ask if anything like this, the Equal Itself, exists or can be known at all, if it can be none of the things we know empirically (are acquainted with) through the senses. Aren’t we just generating fake-explanatory entities bootlessly in a vacuum, here? But it seems we can know things about what is perfectly equal independently of the senses, for instance that if one thing is equal to another, the other is equal to it, and if two things are equal to a third, they are equal to one another. We know these things, it seems, by knowing what it is to be equal. But we can know that only by being acquainted somehow with an equality that is, as it were, self-identifying or self-revealing, that does not require us to be acquainted with something else so we can tell it is equality.\textsuperscript{118} There must be something that is whatever it is to be perfectly equal, the Equal is something. Moreover, these things we know about equals must be true of the Equal in virtue of its equality. Moreover, if we know these things by knowing the Equal, the Equal must always be available for knowing, and always be equal, and necessarily so. An equal stick can perish, and then it is no longer available to support knowledge.\textsuperscript{119} So sensibles cannot be the ultimate objects of our knowledge, and there must be something else which is, the Forms. So there must be some way to be acquainted with such non-sensible things. Moreover, these Forms have being (perhaps we do not want to say they have existence)—equality is something. Still, they do not depend on the existence of things that participate in them to have this being, this content. Equality is equality, regardless how the equal cat we are considering may stand, or even if it continues to exist. The Forms are separate objects of knowledge. We must know them to know sensible particulars.

Having established that the Form, say, of Piety or Equal is thus different from the sensible things that are pious or equal, Plato can argue that the Form is separated from sensibles, that the Form is not found only in things that are pious or equal, but has its own being quite independently of the existence of such things. The crucial assumption here is that what is only in a thing depends on that thing for its being, an assumption that captures the spirit of the Socratic proposal that piety is only found only in persons and actions and the like. The

\textsuperscript{118}If one is looking for a way to escape Plato’s logic, of course, this assumption is the one to attack. Perhaps we can know what it is to be equal without being acquainted with such a pure paradigm of equality at all. Perhaps our knowledge what it is to be equal can be understood, not through what we are acquainted with, but through various abilities for comparison and judgment that we have. There is something rather miraculous about Equality itself, and how we are acquainted with it, if it is to be unmistakable in the way Plato assumes it is.

\textsuperscript{119}Phaedo 74bc, for the first point, 102c makes the last point in regard of the tallness of Simmias. From the first point it would follow, of course, that anything that was at one time F and another not F could not be the Form of F. This would mean it was F and not F in different respects. This provides the connection of the theory being developed to talk about the contrast between being and becoming, to be examined below in connection with the later dialogues.
equality found only in the stick can perish, and does so when the stick becomes unequal or ceases to exist. If some equality in the stick does not perish, and so can be identified as the Equal that is known by us, then it must leave the sticks and go elsewhere when they are destroyed or cease to be equal, and so it exists separately, on its own, not in dependence on the sticks or any other perishable equal.

The Form of Equal that we understand never changes and never perishes (never ceases to be), for it is always available to support our understanding of equal things, and it is equal, and in no way unequal, for the understanding cannot mistakenly think about anything other than equality when it attends to them. So if we must say the Form depends on something for its existence, it presumably depends on its being knowable or conceivable (not, be it noted, on its being known or conceived), not its presence in sensibles. So it is demonstrable that the Form of Equals need not be in a sensible equal, and is not known through our knowledge of sensible equals, the equality of the sticks being one of the things we see in them. We do not abstract the form of equality, draw it forth, from sticks, or construct it as a concept from our experiences of sticks. We must know it beforehand to recognize it in the sticks in the first place, before any such abstraction or construction could take place.

That then, is the argument for the separation of the Forms. Now, shifting away from forms associated with very general relative notions like equality, we can generalize the argument. First, let us apply all this to an old-fashioned Ideal Form, such as piety. It is clear that piety, unlike any particular pious action, must be always, and in every way, pious, if it is to be an object of understanding, just as the Equals are always and in every way equal. Perhaps, though, a person has the standard of perfect piety in him, since he conceives piety and models his actions on it, and perhaps something else in him prevents his following that ideal in every respect. Piety might be like heat or fire, rather than equality, then. But Socrates assumed that piety is a perfect knowledge of the good, and that no human being has that. So it looks like no one’s conception of piety can be perfectly pious, except a god’s, perhaps. Or perhaps the intention is that we do sometimes have well-supported, true opinion about the good, which is very like piety, indeed, may be exactly like it in everything except its security from refutation. In that case the ideal may be there, perfectly, in our minds, it’s just that we do not have the guarantee that a knower does that it cannot at some point be abandoned due to a false refutation that we cannot answer. Probably, Socrates was unaware of the problem, but Plato would not have been, at least not by the time he wrote the Middle dialogues. Can a person do a pious act even though he does

\[120\text{See Devereux (1994).}\]
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not have a correct conception of piety, as long as he intends piety and in fact gets it right this time around? Surely we ought to allow so, and if we do, it might seem that piety cannot be dependent on the soul for its being. It is something, and is always what it is, that is, we do not simply make it up, and we may conceive it wrongly in some way, while still conceiving it. If piety is simply whatever we make up, there should be no standard by which we can tell our conception falls short. It does not exist through a convention. But then it is not known by acquaintance with sensible acts, or even from the ideal conceptions we find within ourselves, for none of these things are unambiguously pious. What is in the soul is this imperfect conception, modeled on the Form outside, and an act is pious because it shares in Piety, not because it matches up to our possibly false conception of piety. So piety is a separated Form with its own existence.

Moreover, Plato suggests in the *Phaedo* that such things as size, health, and strength have Forms, since we know what each of them is. This is an aggressive move, identifying as Forms those things which might be supposed to constitute the existence of bodies, their bulk and location in space, the organization that is responsible for their functioning as the sorts of thing they are (natural kinds), and their ability to affect other things causally. There seems to be an implicit argument, to the effect that understanding the existence of bodies and sensibles involves understanding one or another of these three, and that can only occur through understanding what bulk, causal activity, or proper organization really is, which can only occur through knowledge of their Forms. To know the existence of sensibles, we must grasp these Forms, and clearly these Forms are what they are independently whether the sensible bodies in question exist or not—their being lies behind and is presupposed by the existence of sensible bodies.

Let us consider briefly the Forms of natural kinds (we will look at them more closely a little later). The

121It is not at all clear that this line of argument is conclusive. Piety in human souls, that is, their understanding of the ideal of piety, might always be imperfect, even though piety is only to be found in the soul. If we take Piety to be whatever ideal is demanded by human nature, it may be that human beings never figure that out perfectly, but it is objectively “what it is” even if it does not exist outside human beings (for it depends on human nature, and one can only be pious if one has some understanding of piety). But Plato might reply that Piety is what it is independently of whatever particular human beings may think, in this case, and, of course, an ideal Form will be imitable only by that sort of thing to which such an ideal is appropriate. So he could take this sort of dependence on human nature to be consistent with the separation of the Form.

122In the passage introducing the Forms in that dialogue, *Phaedo* 65de.

123Compare the “battle of the Gods and the giants” in the *Sophist*, which identifies existence for bodies as causal activity, and then seeks something comparable for Forms.

124So far as I know, this implicit argument is not noted by any of the commentators. As the White Knight would say to Alice, it’s my own invention. But it might be right, nonetheless.
Form of Cat has not been shown by the argument for separation of the Forms not to be in particular sensible cats, for surely a cat, say Sylvia, is in every respect a cat, perfectly a cat even if not a perfect cat, and can only cease being a cat if she is destroyed, and then, as she ceases to be a cat in every respect, she also ceases to exist at all, and it remains the case only that she was a cat. Of course, to serve as a Form for Cat, Sylvia must be conceived as a cat, and there is a great deal she is aside from being a cat, for instance, she is grey and short-haired, and the runt of the litter, and there are cats other than Sylvia. But there is nothing contrary to being a cat there. So she cannot be identified as the Form of Cat, but may have the Form in her. Perhaps we can argue that there is a Form of Cat separate from sensibles like Sylvia, relying on the fact that no sensible cat, or anything in it, is eternal. But even though there is nothing in a particular cat that is there eternally, the Form of Cat in Sylvia is also, perhaps, in Sylvia’s offspring. Such an inheritable Form might never be found outside particular cats, and nonetheless be eternal if there are always and always have been cats. Such a form would differ from the cats it is in, of course, but would not be separated from them. Another difficult case would be fire, the Hot itself, which might be argued to be essentially hot, and so hot in every respect and necessarily always hot. If sensible heat always admits of degrees, perhaps this natural heat found in fire is not sensible. Perhaps sensible ‘fire’ is always an impure form of the stuff, since pure fire would destroy the senses, and so is never sensed. Fire was thought by Empedocles and Anaxagoras, for instance, to be eternal and indestructible. So fire, if not exactly sensible, could serve as an object of understanding or knowledge, as the Form of the Hot or the Hot Itself, and it is a natural object involved in natural causation and explanation, and a quantity of fire is surely a natural particular. All Plato has shown then, is that some Forms cannot be in the sensibles that share in them, not that no Forms can, and that all Forms must be themselves eternal even if the participants in them are, taken one by one, not.

Now Forms are supposed by Plato to explain why particular sensibles have the characteristics they do. This is quite a different point from their separation from sensibles, and it is essential to Plato’s program if he is to argue, as he wants to, that the Form of the Good shapes the world. So, in the middle of the Phaedo he presents another argument with a different focus, holding that some Forms not only differ from sensibles, and

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125 Republic VII 523b-d says that some things obviously have Forms distinct from their sensible participants, but a finger does not obviously have a distinct Form in which it participates, for sight doesn't suggest that a finger is at the same time the opposite of a finger.

126 Plato does not buy this in the Timaeus, arguing that fire can be destroyed and the triangles making it up rearranged as something else. So the form of Fire is the tetrahedral shape of the fire particle, and is mathematical, not a sensible. Actual particles of fire can be destroyed.
are not found in them either, but rather separated from them, insisting not just on the Forms’ independent being, but also that sensibles are what they are because of their imitation of these separated Forms. 127 What is it in a thing, he asks, that causes it, say, to be taller? If one person is taller than another by a head, does that mean that the head, that distance or length, say, is what causes the person to be taller? That length is in the person, perhaps, inasmuch as something that is that distance long is part of the person, perhaps his head. Would the addition of that height to a short person cause him to be taller than the other person? At first sight it may seem so, but Plato argues that it is not. After all, what sort of causation are we imagining here? If it is natural causation, so that the head or the eight inches is supposed to bring it about that Simmias is taller than Cebes, even a moment’s reflection would lead to doubt. Plato clinches that it cannot be natural causation by pointing out that the same head or distance would cause Cebes to be shorter as well, so that the same thing would cause opposites, which cannot happen. It is not due to the nature of eight inches that Simmias is taller, as if eight inches brings it about that he is in the way fire brings it about by its nature that things are warmer. But something must by its nature bring it about that a given thing has the property it has. 128 But perhaps being taller is caused by the eight inches in Simmias in another way, in the way that heat is caused in a thing by the presence of fire in it. But the fire is itself hot, and so lends its heat to that with which it is mixed, and the head is—well, the eight inches is rather small, compared to Cebes, and so the presence of the smaller (something smaller than Cebes!) in Simmias causes him to be larger than Cebes, and this, of course, is absurd. 129 But if it is not the additional height, what is it in Simmias that causes him to be taller? Plato is challenging Socrates, in effect, to produce the form that is not separated from Simmias, but in him, that makes him taller than Cebes. He refuses to identify as this form the quality being-taller-than-Cebes in Simmias, presumably because it is clear that naming such a quality does nothing to explain why Simmias is taller. So what is in Simmias that might serve as the cause of his being taller than Cebes? There is nothing in Simmias carrying greater stature than Cebes, or

127 Phaedo 97b–102a.

128 Phaedo 101ab. It is not entirely clear that this is well argued. What heat causes in a thing depends on the situation—it causes some things to glow, but not others, for instance, and only when there is enough of it. So nothing, it may be, is a natural cause of anything except under the right conditions. So might there not be some conditions under which a quantity by its nature causes something to be greater, and others in which it causes it to be lesser, depending on how the quantity is fit into the situation? Alternatively, maybe the addition of the height brings it about that Simmias is taller, and the subtraction of the height brings it about that Cebes is shorter, assuming that one is looking for an efficient cause here?

129 Phaedo 101b. Again, perhaps the rather small eight inches only causes largeness in respect of Cebes when conditions are right, or perhaps the addition of the eight inches, even if it is rather a small addition, is still an addition, and so good enough to cause what it is added to to be taller.
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even greater stature in general, in the way that the fire carrying heat might make a poker hot.\textsuperscript{130}

At this point, we might say that there is indeed nothing in Simmias that causes him to be taller than Cebes at all, for his being taller is a matter of his being related to Cebes, who stands \textit{outside} him. But it would be hard to maintain that Cebes makes Simmias taller. Surely his being taller has as much or more to do with Simmias as it does with Cebes, even if it is Cebes he is taller than. Plato concludes that what causes him to be taller is his relation to the Tall Itself, which stands outside him, which he comes to be like when he becomes taller than Cebes, due to the addition of eight inches to his height. Thus a \textit{formal} rather than an efficient cause is provided for his tallness, for the Tall itself is the nature of tallness, pure and uncontaminated by any connection to sensible particulars, and it is by resembling this in connection with Cebes that Simmias fits the real definition of the tall in respect of Cebes. Plato, as we shall see, represents the Forms as the causes of every intelligible characteristic we encounter in the world in his later dialogues, and they are causes not in the way that fire causes heat in that in which it is found, but in some other way, inasmuch as things share in or imitate them and so have their own natures and the natures of the characters found in them.\textsuperscript{131}

It seems, then, that Plato’s claim that the Forms are separated from things amounts to a rejection of Socrates’s substantive view that Forms influence things because they are in them, either in the way that heat is in things, or as a conception of piety is in Euthyphro, who then attempts to conform his actions to it. Equality, the perfect equality in all respects that we understand, is not in two sticks in either of these ways, nor is there any other way we can propose that it is in these sticks. That would suggest, if the formal cause of Simmias’s tallness is to be the Form of tallness, that we need to explain why it is that Simmias has come to resemble the form in question, in respect of Cebes. Socrates has no explanation to give at the moment. But however it is that this has come to happen, what makes Simmias taller is his resemblance to the Form, in respect of Cebes. That much we can reasonably be sure of. So the Form of Tallness exists, tallness is something, but its existence does not depend on being in Simmias. Perhaps its being in Simmias is brought about naturally, but it does not seem to be brought about solely by something in Simmias, of course, because Cebes is involved. What is in Simmias is “tallness in respect

\textsuperscript{130}There are some very implausible suggestions made in this stretch of the \textit{Phaedo}, but the point, of course, is precisely that only implausible suggestions can be made. We are invited to note how implausible the suggestions are, not to swallow any of them.

\textsuperscript{131}He also makes the separated forms, at least sometimes, efficient causes or part of efficient causes of the sharing in them. To do this, it seems, he adapts one of the Socratic ways in which a form can be within a thing, for the Craftsman produces things looking to the form as a model, rather as Euthyphro might produce actions looking to Piety Itself as a model. But he seems to suggest in the phrase “looking to the form” that the Craftsman does not have the form within him, and one at least strongly suspects that all this is somehow metaphorical. We shall look at it more closely below.
of Cebes,” *that* kind of tallness, which is caused in Simmias inasmuch as he is caused to resemble the all (in respect of Cebes), so that the Tall is at least part of the cause of the tallness in Simmias.

The upshot and point of the theory of separated Forms is that the Form of the Good, something not formulated by human beings or dependent on human nature, stands outside of good things, and causes them to be good. Plato accepted, in the end, a realm of being outside the natural world that guides the natural world intelligently toward the good, and guarantees the rationality of the Socratic faith in the gods’ care for the wise and virtuous man. Has Plato shown, then, at this point, that the world is ruled by the Good? I think not. Things are good because of the Good, but how does this work? The Good must cause things to be good through their resemblance to it. The next question, then, is why things come to resemble the Good. Now a *precise* cause of resembling the Good, a cause by its nature adapted always to produce that effect, can only be some intention that the thing resemble the good, combined, perhaps with wisdom, but all sorts of *accidental* causes of such resemblance might be identified. Perhaps in such cases the thing is not really good, or maybe we should say it is accidentally good, though nothing aimed at its being so. Surely there are qualities like that, which occur accidentally, and have no precise cause at all, no cause in the way that acceleration is caused by force, say. There is no precise cause, one would think, of being six feet tall, or having yellow splotches. Lots of things are six feet tall and have yellow splotches, for all sorts of different, accidental *reasons*. If *all* the causes of everything that turns out to be good are, as it happens, accidental, so that things happen only *as if* for a purpose, then the separated Form of the Good will not be a cause of the good things in the world in any sense useful to Plato. But in that case, Plato might object, it won’t really be possible to understand why anything is good. Any explanation we give just happens to work, accidentally, that is all. The same thing happens, it seems, with explanations why something is tall, that is, with explanations in general. Surely there must be some reason why things are the way they are, and it is not just all a matter of accident! At this point we might say, “no there doesn’t have to be a reason for *that,*” but Plato thinks there must be one, for there is always a reason why things are the way they are.  

132 That there is a separated Form of the Good, since we can conceive the Good, and that this separated Form is not constructed by us, might be granted then, without granting that the Good rules the world, but only at the cost of making the world, insofar as it is good, unintelligible. If the world is as it is only insofar as it is good, then it makes the world flatly unintelligible. Plato thinks that recognition of the Form of

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132 This is the Principle of Sufficient Reason, of course. There is a difference between the particular ways in which things are, and how-things-are, taken to identify the totality of the way things are. There may be causes for the particular ways, accidental ones, even though there is no cause for totality of them. Look back at Gorgias. But this all bears further discussion.
the Good in the first place hangs on recognition of the separation of Forms, and the separation of the Form of
the Good perhaps is required to see that the natural order reflects the Good, and this cannot be explained
unless it is deliberately caused to do so. But the latter parts of the argument, as yet, still require to be filled in.

8. RECOLLECTION AND KNOWLEDGE

For true opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is
good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man’s
mind, so that they are not worth much unless one ties them down by an
account of the reason why.


Is there such a thing as a Fire by itself? Do all of these things of which we
always say that each of them is “by itself” really exist? Or are the things we
see, and whatever else we perceive through the body, the only things that
possess this kind of actuality, so that there is absolutely nothing else besides
them at all?… here’s how I cast my own vote: If understanding and true
opinion are distinct, then these “by themselves” things definitely exist, these
Forms, the objects not of our sense perception, but of our understanding
only. But if, as some people think, true opinion does not differ in any way
from understanding, then all the things we perceive through our bodily
senses must be assumed to be the most stable things there are. But we do
have to speak of understanding and true opinion as distinct, of course,
because we can come to have one without the other, and the one is not like
the other… Understanding always involves a true account while true belief
lacks any account. And while understanding remains unmoved by persuasion,
true belief gives in to persuasion.

Plato, *Timaeus* 51b–e.

Plato adopted the theory of Forms because it solved a large number of problems all at once for him,
many of those problems central to the world view of Socrates, which he was trying, with increasing hesitation,
to preserve in some form in the face of his own acute criticism. Another issue for which the Theory of Forms
offered some relief, related to the Parmenidean anxiety over the nature of a proper object of knowledge, was
the defense of the Socratic account of the acquisition of true, well tested, theoretical beliefs through elenchic
argument. No doubt, the problem had bothered him for some time before his trip to Sicily, and he saw in
Pythagoreanism an answer to it. The issue is introduced in the *Meno* by what has come to be called the
‘paradox of inquiry.’ As in the Protagoras and the Gorgias, Plato seems to want to do the best he can by Socrates here without his new metaphysics, clarifying his views and doing what he can to make them work without bringing separated Forms into the picture, and leaving hints that this is simply not going to be good enough in the end.

Meno, finding himself unable to defend his view of the nature of virtue, asks,

How will you look for it [for virtue], Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?

Socrates says that this reminds him of an old Sophistic dilemma:

A man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know. He cannot search for what he knows—since if he knows it there is no need for search—nor for what he does not know, for then he does not know what to look for.133

This is not the argument made by Meno, and Socrates tries to answer Meno’s argument, not this one. The difference in the two is that Meno is concerned with how Socrates can inquire into what virtue is if, as he himself had said a moment ago, he knows nothing at all about it. One can, of course, search for what one does not know if one knows something about it that will enable him to recognize when he has the right answer in hand at last. So if, in the usual example later given to illustrate the problem, one is looking for a runaway slave, one needs to know enough about him to recognize him when he is standing before us, even though, of course, one does not yet know where he is. One might reply here that we know something about the explanation provided by the definition of virtue, for instance, that when we find it it will not involve absurd rejections of what we already know, and will predict the phenomenon explained, or even enable one to reproduce the phenomenon. But what do we know already? Might not the new definition force us to reassess who is virtuous, for instance? And what looks absurd now may look sensible enough once we understand better what virtue is. And what are the phenomena to be explained? Surely they are certain facts about virtue, about which Socrates has just said he knows nothing, on the ground that he does not know what virtue really is yet.134 How would we recognize a correct account what virtue is if in fact we know nothing about virtue?

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133Meno 81de, trans.G.M.A. Grube. My account of the Meno’s argument depends a good deal on Fine (1992), and Dancy (2004).

134Of course, it may be that one can know something about virtue without knowing what it really is. One can know things about alcohol, for instance, without knowing what it really is, for instance, we can know (?) that it is ordinarily inebriating taken in significant quantities. If we synthesize (or define) something that isn’t inebriating, well, that’s not alcohol, and we must have guessed wrong as to how to synthesize (or define) alcohol.
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He answers the question by undertaking to lead a slave of Meno’s in an investigation of a question in geometry. The boy is given a square, and then asked how long the side of a new square will be if that square has double the area of the given square. Socrates helps him to the right answer, and then points out that the boy, who did not know the answer to start with, was able to recognize it when he hit on it, and had at his disposal what he needed to find the answer, and could reject a false answer suggested along the way—all because he had a number of relevant true beliefs bearing on the matter. These beliefs were his own, for even if Socrates suggested some of them to him, he considered the matter and decided on his own that they were correct. This provides the reply to the paradox—if one has true beliefs of the right sort, one can recognize the answer to one’s question without knowledge. One truly believes, but does not know, that the correct definition, or the answer to one’s question, will be the one that meets certain criteria—in the case at hand, the answer can be checked by comparing the areas of the proposed square and the square of which it is supposed to be the double, by seeing if congruent parts can be suitably matched up with one another. When one finds an answer that passes the test, one recognizes the truth. Moreover, we may have correct beliefs that not only identify, but lead us to the right definition, and enable us to refute false definitions, even though we do not have knowledge that enables us to do this. Socrates holds, then, that one does not need to know what the answer is already to recognize it, nor does he need to know what to look for—he only needs to have appropriate true beliefs concerning what to look for.

This addresses the problem at hand, but leaves a residual question. Does the boy get knowledge of the right answer in this case, or only true belief about it? The historic Socrates, after all, was a skeptic, who denied that anyone could have knowledge, because no one will ever have responded to every possible refutation that might be mustered against his belief. Indeed, we might argue that the boy proceeded only from true belief, and it is hard to see how he would make the transition from mere true belief to knowledge. But Plato’s ‘Socrates’ tells us that

these opinions have now been stirred up like a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as exact as anyone’s…

This suggests he has true opinions now, and further discussion, elaborating and strengthening these opinions, and providing them with more and more theoretical context, will eventually turn them into knowledge, at least

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135 Meno 85d. I have substituted ‘exact’ for Grube’s ‘accurate.’ ‘Accurate’ suggests simple correctness, and the boy already has the answer right, and has a proof that it is right. I think Plato meant to suggest that the boy’s knowledge would become more complete and detailed, in particular as he saw how it fits into the rest of geometry.
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in part by making them more exact. Again, he says that at some time he “will have true opinions, which, when stirred by questioning, become knowledge…” This means that the knowledge gradually grows within him, that his true beliefs eventually become knowledge, once they are consolidated by sufficient questioning, leading to the activation and deployment of other true opinions. Plato provides a definition of knowledge later in the dialogue that supports this view (thus moving it toward knowledge). Moreover, his definition, deeply rooted in the Socratic vision of expert knowledge, provides a basis to reply to the Socratic argument for skepticism without abandoning the Socratic elenchus as the way to true belief.

Knowledge, Plato says, is true opinion together with a correct account why things are as they are opined to be. Now this means that knowledge is simply a matter of having the right beliefs, a true belief with an accompanying set of true beliefs that fit together into an account why the first belief is so (perhaps along with a belief that they do in fact provide this account). Justification is nowhere mentioned. The correct account is not a justification for believing the fact known, rooted in an account how we come to believe that fact, but a scientific account why the fact believed is as it is, an explanation why this is so rooted in a real definition expressing an understanding of the fundamental structures and events producing the phenomena. Nonetheless, this correct account serves to ‘tie the true opinion down’ so that it is not easily altered when faced with fallacious refutations, much as justification might. The Socrates of the Meno argues that it is the stability of knowledge, as opposed to the instability of correct opinion, that makes it more valuable, not the superior usefulness of knowledge as a guide to action. The refutations to which Socrates imagines us responding are not directed at the justification for our beliefs, but at their content. Someone who knows why virtue is teachable, because she knows what virtue really is and can demonstrate that it is teachable from this account, will have the wherewithal from which to spin out replies to the hard cases. For instance, she can recognize when there is merely the appearance of virtue, but not virtue itself, because the definition of virtue is not satisfied. But the application of the definition to any given false refutation might require all sorts of additional information, theoretical or factual, and so even with the correct account of virtue, unless one knew what

136 Meno 86a.

137 Meno 98a. I take it in what follows that Plato does not include justification for the belief in his account of knowledge, for which see Burnyeat (1981) and (1988). So Burnyeat says that Plato defines scientific understanding here, not knowledge. Gail Fine (1990), and most other scholars (for instance, Barnes (1988)), reject this conclusion, holding that Plato thinks the possession of a true explanation why it is so provides one with justification for believing that it is so, but I think she is wrong about this.

138 Meno 97b.
teaching is, for instance, and a great deal more about the world, one might still be caught out by a refutation of one’s belief that virtue can be taught. Only a perfect mastery of the account, which would include a mastery of the whole field of knowledge in which the belief occurred, as well as allied fields insofar as they impinge upon it, would entirely remove any chance of refutation. An absolutely complete mastery would not be possible unless one knew everything, it might seem, and so one might suppose that knowledge is impossible. Plato’s definition, however, does not insist that we know everything before we have a correct account, so that every conceivable detail of the relevant account is at hand, and nothing bearing on it is missed. The correct real definition seems to be enough, for Socrates always seems to hold in the dialogues that one needs the real definition to have knowledge but does not suggest what we might need further. In that case his knowledge becomes more exact with further development, but is already knowledge, at least of an inexact sort, as soon as he gets the definition, the account (logos), right. Perhaps possession of the definition is enough by itself because it is on this basis that a correct response can be developed making the view defensible in the face of new information, so that it may need to be elaborated and adjusted, but never has to be entirely abandoned in response. One is refuted only if he has to abandon his view in reaction to new arguments, and with the right definition in hand, you never have to. As we move toward universal knowledge, our account, and our knowledge, becomes more complete, or ‘exact,’ but Plato is willing to grant that inexact knowledge is still knowledge.

But with all this a problem remains. For say that the true opinions one has are only accidentally true, that is, they are not opinions acquired in any way that guarantees their reliability. In that case one might not expect things to work out very often at all. In fact, Socrates points out, things do work out fairly well in geometry and elsewhere much of the time, and we can rely on our opinions to guide us to knowledge. Somehow, they do turn out to be correct. Why? Where did the correct opinions which were stirred up in the boy came from? They cannot be held merely at random, and he did not get them from Socrates, for Socrates only elicited them from him. Has the boy ever been taught geometry? He has not. Then he did not acquire them in this life, unless he picked them up from the senses through perceptual observation. For some reason Socrates does not think this is a possibility—is it that the objects of mathematical investigation are not in fact objects of perception, so that we never actually encounter a genuine, perfect triangle? In any case, the boy’s geometrical opinions must have been acquired in some way that makes them likely to be true, and only beliefs acquired in that way will form a proper foundation for investigation into the sciences. If these geometrical opinions could not have been acquired from observation through the senses, they can only have been acquired
through discussion. They must have been recollected from some earlier time when the boy knew them. It must be that before this earlier time, he explored their consequences in discussion, saw their adequacy within a properly extensive system of geometrical beliefs, and so arrived at knowledge, and all this, of course, would have happened before his present life.

Socrates spins this into an argument for the immortality of the soul. Assume, as seems to be the case, that one can only come to know such things as the nature of virtue or the truths of geometry through inquiry. And assume that inquiry is only effective if we already have true beliefs. Assume, finally, that such true beliefs can only come from knowledge previously acquired through inquiry, knowledge that has decayed and lost its explanatory context. That is, one cannot see the truth here directly, but rather must see what follows from various assumptions, test possible views against more or less firmly held beliefs, and so on, in the Socratic manner. Moreover, assume, as seems reasonable, that even if there is a period of time before incarnation when the soul exists outside of the natural world without a body, that the soul does not then experience anything, or carry out any inquiry. From these assumptions one can argue immediately that whoever recollects in this

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139 This, of course, is a critical step in the argument. How else might they have been acquired? An empiricist such as Hume will generally give an account of mathematical logic tracing it to a knowledge of one’s own ideas and concepts, without reference to whether those concepts correspond to the world or not. Some account how we know about our concepts may then be required of him, of course, and some account why such knowledge constitutes knowledge of necessary truths. But in this way Plato’s chief entry to recollected Forms, or Socratic past lives, is blocked. Nowadays, no doubt, we might argue that natural selection accounts for the fact that we have generally correct beliefs, again blocking Plato’s move to past lives or separated Forms. Descartes supposed these correct beliefs were provided by God, in the end, though they arise in part through the natural operation of our cognitive faculties.

140 *Meno* 85c–86a. For my account of recollection I depend heavily on Scott (1999). The item recollected often has a sense of familiarity about it, particularly when the item is the sort of ethical theory that Socrates seeks. This is what leads us to say, sometimes, that such theorizing is simply a matter of making clear our unconscious or pre-analytic assumptions. (Of course, in modern scientific theories such as quantum theory or relativity, the theory is often so odd, despite its explanatory abilities, that no one would dream of saying that we had known it unconsciously all along, but Ancient theorizing remained much closer to familiar common sense.) It is to his credit that Plato does not argue from this sense of familiarity, for it might well be explained from the fact that the theory, once we formulate it, is seen working in the examples we have been working with for some time, and so the familiarity of the examples, and the sense that they all somehow involve the same thing, attaches itself to the new theory. Still, this sense of familiarity might have suggested the theory of recollection to him.

141 That means, of course, that such knowledge does not arise from the senses, and we shall see Plato arguing in the *Theaetetus* and elsewhere that it in fact cannot. If one thinks it does come from the senses, then one is an “Empiricist.” If the senses inform us reliably of what is going on in the world, then one might reasonably suppose that they provide us with knowledge about the world which can be leveraged, through seeking explanations, to knowledge of real definitions of things. He also supposes that such knowledge cannot arise from discussion without having correct assumptions rooted in pre-existing knowledge. Finally, it assumes that such knowledge is not somehow innate in us, so that we gain it with our creation. We aren’t ever born, of course (or we are born over and over again), but however that works, we are born without knowledge—the mind is at first a blank slate on which nothing is written.
way must have had a previous bodily life in which he knew what he now recollects. But, then, how would he have known this in that previous life? He would have been born knowing nothing, and it is only through recollection that he could have come to know it. So he must have had an indefinite number of past lives, for every life in which he knows is one in which he recollects, and is preceded, therefore, by another life in which he knows. That means he always was. And if that is the case, then surely he always will be. The soul is immortal.

The argument was almost certainly suggested by ideas about transmigration picked up from Pythagoreans, Orphics, and Empedocles’s poems in Italy. Empedocles, in particular, claimed that both he and Pythagoras knew many things because they recollected the previous lives they had lived, a view that was also to be found in India—it seems to be part of the Indo-European heritage. And in Empedocles the claim was that he was a God, as are we all, driven through a cycle of reincarnations to purify him from evil-doing, so that, in principle, anyway, we might imagine he could remember all things if his recollection was sharp enough. As Heraclitus said, “that which is wise is both unwilling and willing to be called Zeus.” Of course, here attention is drawn to recollection of theoretical knowledge rather than personal history, and it is not at all clear that

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142 He does not now know it, and not immediately after recollecting it, either, for one only comes to know by dialectical investigation. The recollection only provides true opinions that help with the investigation.

143 Meno 86a–b. It might be objected that his knowledge is never explained in that case, but in fact his knowledge in any given life is explained by his having learned in a previous life, and then forgotten. If one allows that the world might always have been, and insists that it does not need a cause outside of time, a God, to ground its being, then the situation Socrates described seems possible as well. An interesting parallel to the proposed situation is to be found in the Timaeus, where it is suggested that civilization has risen and fallen an indefinite number of times in the past, so that what the Greeks now are learning is only being re-discovered by them.

144 The argument is a bit difficult to interpret. It begins at 85d, where Socrates concludes that the slave boy will have come to know “without having been taught, but only questioned, and find the knowledge within himself,” and so will have recollected. He then points out that he must either have acquired this knowledge he finds within himself at some time, or else he always had it. If he always had it, he always was, and we can carry the argument for immortality home. If he acquired it (perhaps at the very beginning of his existence) then he acquired it at some time. He has not done so in this life (no one has taught him, and these truths are not the sort of thing gained from the senses), and so he had it earlier, before this life (86a). That may have been a time when he was not a human being, i.e. between lives. But Socrates does not suggest that he acquired or had knowledge when he was not a human being. Instead, he says (86ab), “if then, during the time he exists and is not a human being, he has true opinions which, when stirred by questioning, become knowledge, will not his soul be in a state of having learned during all time?” The reason that he would be in this state for all time is apparently that he cannot learn when he is not a human being, presumably because he cannot engage in inquiry or use the senses, and learning through enquiry when he is a human being always presupposes knowledge to be recollected, which had to have been learned at some earlier time.

145 Pythagoras, according to Empedocles, Fragment 29, was able to recall things from a period of twenty or thirty human lifetimes, and Empedocles attributed similar powers to himself in his Fragment 117.

146 Fragment 41.
Plato’s development of the idea later in the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus* is intended quite literally. But then it is not entirely clear that Empedocles meant it all entirely literally when he spoke of the separated elements or the Sphere as long-lived gods, identifying them with traditional Homeric figures, either. At least he did not intend the Homeric religion most would have associated with such remarks, but instead a rather severe rational reconstruction of it that would reduce most of the stories to mere poetic symbolism. Plato, in treating religious beliefs in this way, was certainly doing nothing he had not seen done before by earlier philosophical poets.

The argument seems cogent, given its premisses, though it does not reappear elsewhere in Plato’s writings. The reason it does not emerges if one asks if it is really possible for our *every* instance of correct opinion to be explained by recollection, without our *ever* having formed correct opinions in any other way, for instance, by some kind of non-sensory direct acquaintance with the thing known. Plato argues in his later work that something must move of itself, for you can’t explain every motion as due to a thing’s being moved by something else which was itself moving earlier.\textsuperscript{147} If that is right, then, in the same way, there cannot be an infinite regress of recollections. At some time there will occur true belief the success of which is to be explained in another way, and Plato thinks that this can only be through actual acquaintance with the thing concerning which we have the belief. If that does not happen in life in the body, then it must happen when the soul is out of the body, and thus we get the myths of the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus*, in which the soul is represented between lives in immediate contact with the Forms.\textsuperscript{148} This, of course, means that the argument presented in the *Meno* for the immortality of the soul won’t work, for we have no reason now to suppose the soul existed before its acquisition of knowledge by direct acquaintance, but since it turns out, as we shall see in the *Phaedrus*, that it is the soul that moves itself, and is therefore immortal, the issue that sinks this argument for immortality raises another in its place.

One last point about the *Meno*’s argument is worth making. If forms are found in sensibles, as Socrates thought, then perhaps we can be directly acquainted with them in this life. Plato’s dialogues never seem to deny

\textsuperscript{147}It is, I hope, not clear that he is right about this. We will look at it more closely later, especially in connection with the proof of God’s existence as the “unmoved mover” in later Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

\textsuperscript{148}The *Phaedo* 107c–114c, is chiefly concerned to present a cosmology adapted to punishments and rewards in the course of multiple incarnations, and so divides the cosmos into higher, more perfect and pleasant places to live, and lower, less perfect places more full of trouble and suffering. Right at the end of the account it is asserted that those who have “purified themselves through philosophy” will enjoy lives altogether free of the body, and live in “beautiful dwelling places which it is hard to describe clearly,” an apparent reference to the vision of the Forms. *Phaedrus* 246a–257b, which is presented without accompanying arguments, is more direct, stating outright that the souls of those sufficiently purified through philosophy will have a direct vision of the Forms, of which the Knower Itself, the Just Itself, and the Temperate Itself are explicitly mentioned.
that one could be acquainted directly, through the senses, with the equality that is in two sticks. It is equality without qualification, which is not found in the sticks or any other sensible, that one is not acquainted with in this life. This suggests that Plato puts this argument for immortality into Socrates’s mouth precisely because he knows that Socrates rejects separated Forms. The knowledge of mathematical truths, or of virtue, that is sought, Socrates would agree, is knowledge of something that we do not encounter in this life, for no human being is truly virtuous, and no sensible is perfectly triangular or square. So if Virtue or Triangle Itself is not a separated Form that we come to know when the soul is free of the body, between lives in this world, then we can only come to it by recollection, that is, by hypothesizing a cause for appearances and then determining that it in fact accounts for all the appearances in a suitable way, and it seems that the infinite regress of recollections presented by Socrates follows. If such a regress is absurd, and we can explain how one can become acquainted with a separated form, then we have a reason in addition to the arguments discussed in the previous section to accept the separation of Forms.

Recollection is discussed again in the Phaedo, and this time recollection of the Forms, which were not mentioned in the Meno, is at stake. Here it is argued that the Form is different from the things similar to it perceived by the senses, for this is needed to establish that recollection of the Form occurs. For one thing to remind us of another the two must be different things, and the knowledge of the one must be a different knowledge from the knowledge of the other, so that one can perceive or know the one without perceiving or knowing the other, and only then can this new perception arise as a result of the old. That the one knowledge differs from the other is clear, it seems, because one cannot have knowledge of either save through acquaintance with it, and whereas one is acquainted with the equality of the sticks through the senses, one cannot become acquainted with the Form in this way. That the Equal Itself is different from sensible equality, and sensible equals, and not merely the same thing known in another way, is clear because the Equal Itself never appears unequal, as the sensible equals do. Now, it is because equal sensibles and the Equal are similar

149Plato, Phaedo 72d–77c. The Meno, of course, does talk about the real natures of things as a subject for recollection, and Plato’s separated Forms are the real natures of the things that participate in them. Imitation of the Form is responsible for a thing being what it is, not for its having some accidental characteristic. The Phaedo discussion also improves on the Meno by providing a definition of recollection, i.e., one knows a thing, and as a result of knowing it, thinks of another thing. It turns out Plato thinks this thought of the other will be due to some relation between the two things of which we become aware in thinking of the first, so that the Form resembles the participant in it that reminds us of it.

150Phaedo 74a-c. That is, it never correctly appears that they are unequal, so that we do not have good reason to suppose they are somehow unequal, as we do in the case of sensibles. Dancy (2004) Introduction 1.2, points out that this is entirely parallel to the argument from flux, i.e. that what is defined is stable, not in flux in the way all perceptible things are, and so is not anything perceptible, which is Aristotle’s way of putting the matter in his discussion of Plato’s departure from Socrates in the separation of the
to one another in being equal that the one reminds us of the other, but one must recognize that the sensibles
are in some way deficient in equality, else we won’t be brought to think of the Form, the Equal Itself. One can recognize that the sticks are equal, Plato thinks, even if he has no recollection of the Form, and he may remain ignorant of the Forms as long as he does not reflect on their deficiency in equality. After all, these are different things, the perception of the equality of the sticks and the knowing of the Equal Itself, and the one can occur without the other. But even so, if one is reminded of the Form upon reflecting on the deficiency of equality in the sticks, so that his experience of sensible equality leads him to compare sensible equality to Equality itself, then he must have been acquainted with the Form before, and he has never been acquainted with it in this life, for in this life we are only acquainted with things through the senses, and so we must have been acquainted with the Form before birth.

Knowledge of equality is knowledge what equality is. Now we can recognize equality and inequality in things without this intellectual knowledge of equality, that is, we can observe that two things are equal or not. We routinely do this in the case of piety as well. We recognize pious actions, which are also, we recognize, impious in some respects, through the senses, without knowing what piety is, so without “knowing piety.” Moreover, this recognition is responsible for our coming to know piety. So how did we acquire the perceptual ability to distinguish pious from impious actions? Now that ability leads to intellectual knowledge of piety, and is fine-tuned by that knowledge, but does not require it to be present, but perhaps it requires it to come into being. How could we train our senses to the recognition of the pious? We would have to train

Forms.

151 That is, in some ways unequal.

152 The argument is rehearsed again in Timaeus 51c–e, quoted at the beginning of this section. Note that Plato seems to think that knowledge of sensible equality arises from the senses alone. He does not even hint that one must know the Equal Itself to recognize the equal length of two sticks. Thus his theory of recollection may be an ancestor to, but does not anticipate, the doctrine of innate ideas in 17th century thinkers such as Descartes. Knowledge of the Forms is not implicit in knowledge of sensibles. Indeed, that it not be so is essential for the argument for recollection of the Forms to work. It is because it is not implicit in sensory experience that one must look for some other explanation how knowledge of the Forms can occur. At Phaedo 76ab it is suggested that knowledge of the Forms may be innate, but this is rejected, for we come to know the Forms from reflection on the imperfections of the things that imitate, we do not always know them. They are forgotten at birth.

153 For this reading of the argument at Phaedo 74a-75b, see Scott (1999) 109, who credits it to Rowe (1993) 172–3.

154 Just to be perfectly clear, Plato does not argue that we must have known the Form before birth. Perception, as he argues in the Theaetetus, discussed below, is not knowledge, and perhaps, neither is acquaintance. But that does not mean it does not occur. Perhaps it means that we can never reasonably be sure it has occurred until we gain knowledge, but that knowledge puts the supposed perception into relation with an entire view of the world, which provides, among other things, an account how the perception might have occurred and why it might have been trustworthy. It adds a great deal to the unadorned perception itself.
them to focus on the piety in an action, not the impiety, and that, it seems, must require that we have some standard by which we can sort out the two. Perhaps we don’t need the standard after training, just as, after training, we might recognize that something is a foot long just by looking at it, without needing a ruler, but we need it beforehand if we are to get the training. If there were no accurate standard, then our perceptions of ‘piety’ would occur at random. It is not like training in the recognition of a sensible quality such as redness. There, we could show a person a lot of red things, and say they are red, and a lot of non-red things, and say they are not red, and then the person could latch onto the sensible difference in the two, after reviewing how the groups are similar within themselves and dissimilar to one another. But the pious and impious things we know through the senses are precisely the same things—whatever is pious (in some way) is also impious (in some way), and vice versa. And so we need something other than the senses to sort them out. We need a form, a perfectly pious paradigm case, that is in no way contrary to the pious, which can be used as a standard. The fact, then, that we can recognize piety and impiety in sensible things is enough to show that at some time we must have known what piety is, through a perfect paradigm. Thus acquaintance with the Forms takes the place of the dialectical investigation of the *Meno*.

Plato does not argue at this place in the *Phaedo* for the soul’s immortality, but only that the soul existed before we were born. Indeed, the argument for immortality in the *Meno* is spoiled here precisely because it is recollection of the Form, and not recollection of expert knowledge, that is at issue. Plato does not intend to account for the knowledge of the Form preceding recollection in this life through recollection in a previous life. Rather, he insists that we must have gained the knowledge at some point through a direct acquaintance with the Form, and he cannot legitimately trace our former lives back before the time of that acquaintance.

The skeptic here might note that there should be things we can just do, without being trained to do them, and training presupposes those natural behaviors. So to train a dog one must seize on something it does naturally, and then reinforce that behavior in circumstances it is able to recognize when they come by again. Some things we can just recognize. If an explanation must be sought out for that, then the physical structure of the brain and the senses, or some such thing, will have to provide it. Or perhaps we can resort to an evolutionary explanation why such a capacity should arise and be selected for, to supplement the explanation how it is physically possible in the first place.

Again, the argument is that this is the only way such a thing could occur. That assertion made by a philosopher is generally a good reason for suspicion. Here one might note that we could have the ability to identify complex facts, that this is pious or equal in a certain respect say, equal in length, pious inasmuch as it exhibits respect for one’s parent, and have that ability without going through any training to acquire it. Indeed, training always presupposes such abilities, and so we have to start out with a fund of such abilities to learn to do anything by training at all. If we can only sense simple states of affairs, then it becomes mysterious how we would come to know any complex facts at all. The world for us would be just “redness” “sphericity” and “sweetness,” and we could never get an apple out of those by observing, say, that they all occur in the same place. We will find that in his late work, the *Timaeus*, Plato seems to be aware of this, though perhaps not of its full significance, for he identifies a kind of spatial relationship prior to geometrical formulations of it as something that is essential to sensibles, and not capable of being understood, but only, it seems, of being sensed.

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However, since he does not think such acquaintance can occur in the life with which we are familiar, in which the soul is associated with a body, he argues that even if it occurred immediately before the present life, still, it happened when the soul was unconnected to the body. This represents progress towards a proof that the soul is immortal, for it establishes that the soul does not depend on the body for its existence, but it by no means completes the proof, and we shall have to look at the rest of what Plato says about the soul in the *Phaedo* later.

So far, it appears that Plato took the knowledge gained through recollection to be a knowledge of the Forms, which is not implicitly present in our knowledge of sensibles. Indeed, if it were implicit in our perceptual understanding of sensibles, that would spoil the argument for recollection, for then our knowledge of the Forms could arise from perceptual knowledge of sensibles directly, without the necessity of a prior knowledge of the Forms.\(^{157}\) What, exactly, is it that is known in knowledge of the Forms, then? First of all, mathematics is known in this way. Our knowledge of the Equals occurs when we know perfect equality, and can state and prove theorems of equality. This knowledge is not of any equality in one or another respect, of things that are equal given certain assumptions, or in one way but not another, or sometimes, but what is equal, always and everywhere, without qualification. Remarkably, some of us seem to have such knowledge, as mathematicians do, concerning the Equal, the Two, the Square, and so forth. Similarly, we seem to have knowledge of the Pious itself, the ideally pious, as opposed to the piety we are aware of through observation in one or another respect in pious sensible actions. It is this sort of theoretical knowledge of ideal cases, which Aristotle might have said arises from abstraction from sensible experience, that Plato holds cannot be traced back to sensible experience at all. Nonetheless, we are reminded of such things as Piety and Equality by sensibles, and so we must have encountered these things at some time, but not through experience. That is the position of the *Phaedo*, it seems. It is closely related to the position of the *Meno*, where it is assumed that knowledge of this sort can somehow be gained through discussion, but only on the assumption that one has the sort of hints that might be available from recollection tracing back to a time when one knew these things quite directly. It is as if we were talking about knowledge of the succession of U.S. Presidents, and were aided in recollecting by our recollections that Lincoln was president during the Civil War, Washington had wooden teeth, and so forth. We might, by discussion, gradually reconstruct the list, but if we do so we depend on previous knowledge of the list (and maybe a good deal else), and a successful reconstruction is enough to show

\(^{157}\)It would be as if we were visually recognizing something is a foot long by using some standard, glancing at a foot-rule as we looked at the object, say, rather than simply “eye-balling” the object. The standard is involved in the process, but if I am looking at a ruler right now I don’t need to have experienced one beforehand.
that we knew this before. In the *Meno* it is assumed that one might have known it before through a previous discussion, and so on *ad infinitum*. In the *Phaedo* it is assumed that one must needs have known it before, but in a way other than through discussion, namely through acquaintance with the object of belief, which is the ultimate source of all knowledge. So, in mathematics we can discuss and argue and prove and hypothesize, but if we are to explain how we hit on the right hypotheses, and how we recognize when what we are doing makes sense, and when it doesn’t, and how we are able to reject the right assumptions, holding on to what is good when we find ourselves caught in contradiction, then we must refer to some other way in which we came to correct beliefs about these things. If it were Presidents or British monarchs, we might suggest that we picked it up from historical reports, from experience, rather than discussion, at some point. But when it comes to mathematics and ideals, we must suppose some other way of coming to belief unrelated to sensation and experience, indeed, unrelated to the cognitive powers rooted in the body. So the soul, perhaps, can be argued to have some sort of being other than corporeal being, since it apparently has a non-corporeal power of recognition, with incorporeal, changeless and necessary things as its object. One last point: it seems clear that Plato assumes that our recognition or awareness of the Forms does not occur in this life. We do not have any experience of the Forms in this life, while we are associated with the body. One does not learn mathematics in this life by gazing upon the Forms, but only through discussion. Here Plato does not waver from the *Meno*.

A third account of recollection occurs in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, through a metaphorical portrait of the soul’s career while it is separated from the body, after death and before rebirth in a new body. The poetic vision here defined the doctrine for many later Platonists, and cannot be ignored, but it introduces nothing really new. Here the soul is likened to a winged chariot, with two horses, one an unruly beast representing the sensory powers and the other far more tractable, representing the part of the soul that loves honor. Reason, a divine being, is the rider in the chariot who guides the two beasts. The chariot flies through the air, rising as high as it can, and may rise so high that its rider can stick his head outside the sphere of the natural world, and gaze upon the Forms beyond, at least for a moment. Now

only the soul that has beheld truth [the Forms] may enter into our human form: seeing that men must understand the language of forms, passing from a plurality of perceptions to a unity comprehended by reasoning; and such understanding is a recollection of those things which our souls saw before as they journeyed with their god, looking down upon things we now

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158 *Phaedrus* 246a–257b.
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...suppose to be, and gazing up to that which truly is.159

Here it is suggested that only human beings have reason (that is, only they are capable of sticking their heads outside the sphere to take a look, not the horses, which reflect all there is in merely animal nature), but to have rational capacities, reason must actually have exercised itself and become acquainted with the Forms. That is to say, human beings, and only human beings, are capable of mathematical reasoning and the conception of perfect ideals. But, of course, few human beings actually exercise this capability. Those who do are the “lovers” spoken of in the dialogue, that is, lovers of the ideal, of beauty itself, and those who do not are the non-lovers. The vision of the Forms, and their recollection, leads to the growth of the soul’s wings, so that it can fly up once more between corporeal lives to view the Forms. Some had the vision of the Forms only for a moment and a long time ago, and find it difficult to recollect, others have suffered corruption by evil associations when they were reborn on the Earth, and such cannot readily and quickly come to knowledge of the Forms, or of the Beautiful, as a result of beholding sensibly beautiful things. Their love is reduced to a pursuit of pleasure, like a beast, and its only outcome is the bearing of children (that is, the continuance of the possibility of knowledge). Such non-lovers do not see the beautiful sensible as an image of the Form, and so they do not recognize the divinity in it, or in the world, and are profane and unholy. Indeed, the first intimations of recollection of the Forms is precisely that sense of the holiness and divinity of things.

This is sublime poetry, perhaps, but Plato surely recognized that it was just that, poetry, not argument or an exact account of things. Nonetheless it does indicate that one aspect of the religious impulse, the experience of the world as eternal, divine, holy and beautiful, as a reflection of perfect goodness, is taken by Plato to belong properly to the rational part of the soul, and to arise from its recollection of the Forms, even if that recollection be inexact and shapeless, as it is in one who does not pursue dialectic to real knowledge of the Good. As St. Augustine and other Christian thinkers would later say, the aim of the Platonists was to know God. Moreover, Plato took it that this mystical experience of the perfect goodness of the world is possible only for a soul that is capable of a life separate from the body, an immortal life outside the natural causal order, and he took it that the body’s desires and the search for honor in this world hinder this holy life, and so the ascetic impulse in religion receives its explanation and justification.

9. THE FORMS OF NATURAL KINDS

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159 Phaedrus 249bc.
Socrates, he said, I admire the bent of your mind towards philosophy; tell me now, was this your own distinction between ideas in themselves and the things which partake of them? and do you think that there is an idea of likeness apart from the likeness which we possess, and of the one and many, and of the other things which Zeno mentioned?

I think that there are such ideas, said Socrates.

Parmenides proceeded: And would you also make absolute ideas of the just and the beautiful and the good, and of all that class?

Yes, he said, I should.

And would you make an idea of man apart from us and from all other human creatures, or of fire and water?

I am often undecided, Parmenides, as to whether I ought to include them or not.

And would you feel equally undecided, Socrates, about things of which the mention may provoke a smile?—I mean such things as hair, mud, dirt, or anything else which is vile and paltry; would you suppose that each of these has an idea distinct from the actual objects with which we come into contact, or not?

Certainly not, said Socrates; visible things like these are such as they appear to us, and I am afraid that there would be an absurdity in assuming any idea of them, although I sometimes get disturbed, and begin to think that there is nothing without an idea; but then again, when I have taken up this position, I run away, because I am afraid that I may fall into a bottomless pit of nonsense, and perish; and so I return to the ideas of which I was just now speaking, and occupy myself with them.

Yes, Socrates, said Parmenides; that is because you are still young; the time will come, if I am not mistaken, when philosophy will have a firmer grasp of you, and then you will not despise even the meanest things; at your age, you are too much disposed to regard the opinions of men.

Plato, *Parmenides* (Jowett Translation)

In a much-cited passage in the *Phaedo* Plato makes Socrates say he was quite excited when he first heard of Anaxagoras’s doctrine that all things were brought about by Mind, expecting to hear that somehow
things came to be for the sake of the good, which Mind might be expected to seek—but then he was disappointed to find nothing but mechanical explanations in Anaxagoras’s thought, of the same sort he had encountered everywhere else.\footnote{Phaedo 97b-99c.} He apparently thought of the Forms as causally important because they were those things toward which sensible things strive, and he thought the drive to realize a Form could not be explained or understood in more basic, mechanical terms. These drives to make the Forms actual are always manifestations of mind actively seeking the good. And so the structure of the natural world and all the kinds of things found in it arise due to some mind’s or minds’ striving to realize the good.

Socrates agrees with Anaxagoras that we understand the world at crucial points in terms of idealizations never fully applicable in every respect to the things to which we apply them. One might respond to this fact by seeking some set of terms that describes things as they really are, presumably at some sub-sensory level, as did Epicurus, the Atomists, and Anaxagoras, and then argue that the terms we generally use provide useful approximations for simple-minded folks like us, who have not the mental capacity to lay out the reality in all its detail. An atomist supposes things actually work mechanically. But we treat them as machines designed for various purposes, as it were, and predict their behavior from their purposes, rather than from the structures of the machines, which are too complex for us to grasp. It is rather like treating a chess-playing computer program as though it actually were trying to win the game. We know better, but it is too hard to predict the program’s behavior on the basis of what is really going on, and acting as if it were an inadequate realization of the ideal chess player gives us another, much easier and generally quite effective way to predict its behavior. Hence the ideal of health, for instance, exists only in conception, not as something that the body actually strives toward, but the concept of health is useful in dealing with the working of the body since the impersonal forces in the body do move it towards health under the usual circumstances.

But Plato’s Socrates does not buy this story. He does not see how it is that treating a thing as though it had a purpose could give us some grasp of its behavior unless it did have that purpose. It must be like a person with a mind, striving to become something, perhaps the perfect chess player, which it is ill-adapted to become, so that it falls short, or like the pious action, which has piety in it only because it really is informed by an intention to accomplish a certain purpose.\footnote{Of course, the chess program is designed by a mind or minds with the intent that it play chess as well as possible, and so the reality behind its structure is in fact a striving of mind for perfect chess play. Moreover, one is tempted to say the explanation of the success of our application of the ideal of health to understanding the operation of the body is that the body is designed, and so...} Mind contains the perfect Form of what it is striving to become
within it, in its conception of the perfect form, else it could not strive to become it. The same must be true of all things that we understand in terms of a Form to which they can only approximate. They draw more or less of the form in them from the form in Mind. But Plato does not have his Socrates tell exactly this story, or any other, in his rejection of Anaxagoras. Socrates simply does not know how it is that the world pursues the ideal, but he notes that it does, and states that Mind’s actions cannot be explained in terms of physical causation. Somehow it is the presence of soul that explains such matters.

The view presented here, that natural kinds are designed to realize the good, and so are Forms conceivable (and perhaps contrived) by mind, is likely a view Plato thought implicit in Socratic thinking, and he hints strongly that the Socratic understanding of forms does not provide the wherewithal to understand how the universe is driven by the good. But we can note that Plato, if he is to have his way on this, must somehow allow that there are separated Forms of natural kinds of things, things such as wolves and water. But such Forms are not, it appears, dependent on our human minds, they are not ideal conceptions we have invented. Wolves are not machines designed by human beings. Moreover, wolves, like other sensible things, never perfectly accomplish their good. So Plato drives for the view that these forms, like mathematical and ethical forms, are separated from sensibles, not found in them, nor in our minds as ideals we are committed to, or imagine the wolf somehow committed to. When we understand wolves, it is the separated Form we understand, and we understand individual wolves only through their resemblance to the Form of Wolf.

In Plato’s Parmenides Parmenides is depicted quizzing a very young Socrates about the forms.\(^{162}\) Socrates first confesses that he is convinced that there are certain very general forms of likeness, unity, and such, all the characteristics which Zeno discussed in his book, raising difficulties resting on the fact that sensible things are both one and many, and like and unlike. These Forms, he claims, are not subject to such difficulties, for unlike the sensible particulars that share in them, each is understood to be exactly what it is, and in no way its opposite. We might add to these another class of Forms, the mathematical Forms of the Pythagoreans, such as the Form of Triangle, or the Odd.\(^{165}\) Some of the first class of forms, the Form of the Equal, for instance, play a central role in mathematics, but do not reflect notions restricted to mathematics. Next, Socrates confesses to Parmenides he is perfectly content that there are forms of rightness, beauty and the like, and designed by a mind, to function in a certain, healthy, way.

\(^{162}\)Parmenides 129-130.

\(^{165}\)These are not listed in the passage at hand, but are quite explicit in the Republic and the Timaeus.
although he does not give his reasons, it is clear that the same argument could be made. But then Socrates hesitates when asked if there are forms of natural kinds, such as human being, or dog, and he is quite certain there are no forms of mud or hair, or other ‘trivial’ things (perhaps things that could not be understood to have a soul or to be approximations to some ideal). Zeno and Parmenides, the authorities in the dialogue, clearly think there are Forms of such things, and suggest that Socrates will too, when he has had more time to reflect. Looking beyond this list in the *Parmenides* we can identify in other dialogues the Forms of artifacts, such as the Form of the Bed, and the Form of the Shuttle, which are perhaps related to ethical Forms, as well as Forms of sensible qualities, which are presumably allied to natural kinds.

There are two ways to read Socrates’s hesitation here. It may be that Plato means to present a historical Socrates, and he knew that Socrates identified Forms only where a thing had a characteristic insofar as it lived up to a certain ideal conception. In the central case the ideal would actually be contained in the thing, as the conception of piety is in a pious mind, and would produce evidence of itself in pious actions and the like. By extension, one might speak of piety in the pious act, or even of an ideal such as unity in a thing which lived up to the ideal of unity which we conceive. (Here, perhaps, the unity in the thing might be identified as whatever it is that is responsible for its living up to the ideal of unity, for instance, the way in which its parts hang together.) Given the hint in the *Phaedo* that Socrates may have been moved to formulate his doctrine of Forms from acquaintance with Anaxagoras, it seems possible that Plato intended to depict him as thinking the existence of Forms and their application to the world depends on their conception by minds. Now, that something such as a cat should exist in dependence on minds was presumably not at all clear to Socrates. Whether it is *one* or not depends on what aspect you consider it under, and perhaps we perceive unity only because we project it upon the object as we separate it from its background for mental consideration. It is one cat, say, but not one color, for it has stripes. But that it is a *cat* does not seem to depend on how we choose to consider it. It either is a cat, or is not, and that is the end of the matter. This is presumably what leads the

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164 *Republic* X 596b.

165 *Cratylus* 389d.

166 The *Hot and the Cold* in the *Phaedo* 103–106, colors in the *Seventh Letter* 342d, and musical notes and speech sounds in *Philebus* 17a–18d. For this list of kinds of Forms, see Wedberg (1955).

167 The interpretation of Socrates as a metaphysical minimalist here depends on Vlastos (1991), Ch. 2.

168 In *Republic* VII 523b ff., Plato points out that one is unlikely to be led to conceive that there are Forms by examining fingers, for fingers do *not* appear sometimes to be fingers, and sometimes not, depending on how one considers them.
young Socrates (the real Socrates, one takes it) in the *Parmenides* to hesitate about there being a Form of a human being or of fire. In the case of things like mud there is a further difficulty, for although one might go so far as to talk about an ideal cat and how well Sylvia Meow-Meow lives up to this ideal (even though, presumably, she does not *consciously strive* to live up to it, since she has no awareness of it), there is no such thing, surely, as any ideal at all that a mere mixture such as mud might be held accountable to.\(^{169}\) It seems, then, that Plato’s arguments for the separation of the Forms in the *Phaedo* simply will not establish that there are Forms of natural kinds. New arguments are needed.

It is sometimes taken that these new arguments are presented in the *Cratylus*. That dialogue is ostensibly about language, the central question being what, if anything, makes the names of things correct.\(^ {170}\) In the dialogue, Cratylus defends the position that there are names that are correct for things quite independently of the language one speaks, so that there is a natural name for each thing. Hermogenes holds that the *imposition* of names is conventional, and that we can impose whatever name we like on something, and that if a name’s *use* is to be called correct, this can only be done in relation to a given language within which certain agreements stand to call a given thing by one name and not another. A modern reader is certainly likely to be sympathetic to this view of things, but Plato is especially concerned with what truth might be found in Cratylus’s position.

In the dialogue, Socrates begins by arguing that there are true and false statements, and so there must be true and false names, since these are parts of statements. That seems almost impossibly crude, but perhaps the intention is that if the statement is true, then it must contain a name which is *true of* something, for it can be true only if the names in it *refer to or describes* things in the world. But, of course, such truth and falsity in names is quite consistent with Hermogenes’s position, for a word may be true of something only within a given language, and the same word (or at least the same sounds, if we insist that a given word has a home only in ‘its own’ language) need not be true of the same things in another language where it has been assigned a different meaning, or even of anything at all if it has been assigned no meaning at all.

Socrates begins the argument against Hermogenes by getting him to reject the usual Sophistic theses

\(^{169}\)In the *Timaeus*, such considerations led Plato to claim that there are things in the world, traceable to the necessity that all sensible particulars be spatial and temporal, that is, material, that cannot be understood as resulting from reason or the good, but only from the limits of necessity on what reason can accomplish looking to the Good.

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on the matter. Things are not whatever they seem to be to a person, as Protagoras held, nor can we say that any given thing both is and is not whatever we wish. This is because some people are wise and some are foolish, as Protagoras admits, and these views, he claims, cannot account for this fact. Practical actions are also some of them wise and some foolish, for they must be done in accord with the natures of the things they deal with, or else they will accomplish nothing. So Protagoras cannot put his relativism together with his pragmatism, for if he assumes that some actions are effective and some not, as his pragmatism requires, this cannot be simply a matter of what seems effective to us. Protagoras had separated the wise from the foolish by the effectiveness of their actions, not the truth of their beliefs, and identified the wise, or true belief, with one that led to effective actions. But Socrates suggests that not just any action can truthfully be regarded as effective.

Then he takes a further step, identifying saying something as a kind of action. The question now is how such an action as saying something can be effective. That it is sometimes effective and sometimes not would presumably be granted by Protagoras, for he does not hold every saying equally wise, only equally true. So wise, or correct saying would be the sort of saying that accomplishes its end, and this saying would have to take account of the nature of the things it deals with. Now naming is part of what we do in saying something, and naming, too, is a practical action, and so it seems that naming also must have some end, and so some standards of correctness or effectiveness apply to it. We would have to know what sort of action naming is, what it is that is done here, to see what those standards would be.

Plato seems to think of saying here as an action that describes the world. It is also, of course, an action that communicates, and if we ask after that correctness that consists in its effectiveness in communication, it may well be that Hermogenes is right, and the correctness of the naming that occurs as part of the saying relies entirely on the conventional rules of the language within which the saying occurs, and which must be followed by the speaker, and known to the listener, if what is said is to be communicated. But if we look at the question whether the saying is true, as Plato wishes us to, not the question whether it expresses in its language what the speaker wished to express, then how does the naming within the statement contribute to that aim? Perhaps Hermogenes could say that it does so in the same way, that is, it must refer to something, and what it refers to is settled by convention. Whether the statement is true or false, the reference and meaning of the names

171 Or, at least, so it seems to Hermogenes. But if it seems that way to him, and things are whatever they seem to be to a person, then he is right. Also, that means it seems to him that Protagoras’s thesis is not true, so it is not. But the real impact of the argument rest in the fact that Protagoras is a pragmatist, and so these things seem true not only to Hermogenes, but to Protagoras himself.
remains all right. But doesn’t ‘cat’ have to name Sylvia truly for “Sylvia is a cat” to be true? Hermogenes might reply that it does, but “‘cat’ names Sylvia truly” is just another phrase for “Sylvia is a cat.” Naming truly is not a way of naming, but a way of using a name in a true sentence. It does not follow that the name is true in the way the sentence is true. So it seems that so far, whatever he may think of the matter, Plato has not actually made much progress against Hermogenes.

But Plato next suggests an account of what naming is that might significantly advance his argument. His suggestion is that naming is “dividing things from one another as they are,” and doing so in the course of “teaching one another.” So a name is a tool for communication, but also a tool for dividing things from one another, that is, referring to one thing as opposed to another, and it seems that not just any division will do, for we must divide things in a way that reflects how they really are distinguished from one another, prior to any action of ours. This last is true, of course, because wise beliefs will be effective, and so wise saying and wise naming will have to attend to how things really are.

What Plato suggests here is that it is the function of names to pick out natural unities, unities which are independent of any perception or understanding of them. Indeed, a particular word occurring in a particular language only embodies the name, serving its function, and it is not identical to the name itself. The real name, the name itself, is a Form. The name itself for cats, say, is not the utterance ‘cat’, but whatever has the same function as that utterance, i.e. whatever designates that natural kind. So the words ‘gato’, ‘felinus’, ‘Katz,’ and so on all participate in or embody the same name—they ‘are’ the same name. The name, it seems, is not, as Hermogenes holds, invented by the one who introduces it into the language. He only determines what utterance will serve as that name in the language. He only determines what utterance will serve as that name in the language. The name itself was there already, and is always there. If an utterance does not mark out a natural kind, it will not be, or perhaps we should say, will not stand in for or represent, any name at all. Elsewhere, Plato suggests that one job of the student of dialectic, the philosopher

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172 *Cratylus* 389d–390a. The refutation of Hermogenes which has been the subject of my discussion up to now runs from 384d–390e, though the conclusion that it is the dialectician or philosopher that is the craftsman whose job is to give names occurs only at the end of the dialogue. First it is suggested that the Sophists or the Poets are the name-givers, and the long etymological section takes Homer and Poets as those who established the Greek language, and embodied a Heraclitean world view in it. For affirmations of the existence of natural kinds and a natural division of nature, see also the *Theaetetus*, *Statesman*, *Seventh Letter*, and *Philebus*. One might note here that Plato’s realist strategy for undermining social constructionism in the case of names could be applied in a lot of other areas as well. As long as there are rational standards, depending on an identifiable aim, to be applied to a social construction, one could say that the ideal case of such a construction can be specified, and is not a matter of convention, but rather depends on the nature of the construction. Thus marriage, say, might occur in any number of cultures, and be very different in different cultures, and it may be that some forms of marriage fulfill the aims of marriage rather poorly, others rather better, as a matter of objective fact. This does hang, though, on marriage having the same aim in the different cultures considered, and aims themselves are often expressible only in terms of social constructions (the aim of courtship is to find a marriage partner), so probably only the most basic forms of social construction could be straightforwardly considered as natural kinds in this way, though someone might hold that all
who is studying the Forms, is to divide things “by classes, where the natural joints are, trying not to break any part as a bad carver does.”

The discussion following these remarks seems to concern the conventionally assigned embodiments of names, and whether there are standards of correctness for them or not. It seems the chief lesson imparted here is that one should choose embodiments that are easy to learn and remember, for the issue here is the ‘teaching’ function of names. Thus the names should be like what they name, and Socrates pursues many fanciful and amusing onomatopoeic etymologies of Greek words to argue that they are well-assigned to the naming-functions they have. But, of course, Plato has made his point against Hermogenes, and he completes his argument before this comic interlude, pointing out that the person who is the best judge of the correctness of names—that is, whether a proposed embodiment of a name actually is a name that picks out a natural kind—is the dialectician, who can seek out the real essences of things through his questions. The structure of reality will be mirrored in the structure of the language that such a dialectician approves. The structure that Cratylus finds in the Greek names examined by the party supports the theory of Heraclitus that all things are in flux, and Cratylus proceeds to make his point, claiming that one who knows the names knows the things they name, and that Greek reflects the work of an expert namer, and embodies the correct view how things really are.

But now it is Cratylus who draws Socrates’s fire. First, Socrates refuses to accept that Homer and the poets, the givers of the Greek names, if they are indeed to be read as suggested, are experts. Socrates also points out that alternative etymologies, which do not support Heraclitean theories, might be introduced, and indeed, that we seem to find contradictory world-views presented in different parts of the language. But if the name-giver for Greek really did hold the Heraclitean view, we need to know how he arrived at it before we social constructions are in fact natural kinds. Else they could not be the subject of scientific understanding.

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173 Phaedrus 265d.e.

174 Cratylus 435d–436c. Is the identification of natural kinds really the function of the dialectician? We should say nowadays that it is the function of that scientist who is studying the particular sorts of things the natural kinds fall under. For cats we consult biologists, for minerals geologists, and so forth. Aristotle would agree with us. But in any case the point remains that it is the function of someone seeking to know the truth, not of someone legislating for language, or studying conventions.

175 Is he right? Perhaps they are not scientific experts, but unless they have the basic structure of the world right, could they deal with the world at all? Perhaps by instinct we all know (or quickly come to know) the basics, the basics that apply to us, in any case. Plato would certainly allow this, given his doctrine of recollection. But Socrates the skeptic would not. Plato would reply that he had better, or else he cannot make a brief for the expertise of the scientist, as we have seen.
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can judge if he was right. The mere fact that it is embodied in the language does not establish that it is right. We must learn about realities first, then we can assign names to them, and so we must be able to grasp reality independently of our language. We need to perceive the original, and then we can say whether our language has the same structure as the original. Now if the sensible world is indeed, as Cratylus thinks, in a continuous state of flux, meaning that whatever name can be correctly applied to a sensible thing, the opposite can also be applied in another respect, then such knowledge cannot be acquired through the senses, or of sensibles. There must be another way, if language is to do its job. So there must be things not subject to flux, which are knowable, but not through the senses, and the sensible things must participate in these things in such a way that the names of them can be applied to sensibles, presumably insofar as they resemble them. These things, of course, are the Forms. So the expert in naming is a dialectician, who imitates in his names the being or essence of things, not merely their external appearance or sounds. In the end, only the Forms have names, for the function of a name is to bring something to mind, and that means bringing some definite, one thing to mind, and something that is in no way contrary to that, then, and bringing to mind what it really is.

Plato presents, then, the same argument for the existence and separation of the Forms in the Cratylus that we have already seen in the Phaedo. There is nothing new here. In presenting it at the end of the dialogue, Socrates even uses the example of beauty, an ethical Form, and it is hard to find in the dialogue an actual example of a natural kind, such as cantaloup or chalcedony, being discussed, even in the etymological section. Why, then, has the dialogue been taken to address the issue of separated Forms for natural kinds? The answer must be that the pseudo-Heraclitean flux is supposed to apply to everything in the world, at least in Cratylus’s version of it, so that it leaves no room for any stable natures, not even those of natural kinds such as hand or rabbit, among sensibles. So Aristotle tells us,

Cratylus. . . in the end did not think it right to say anything, but only moved his finger, and criticized Heraclitus for saying that it is impossible to step twice into the same river; for he thought one could not do it even once.

This suggests that one cannot refer to the river to talk about it, one cannot name it, because it is changing. But, of course, the doctrine of Forms saves us from the unknowable, unsayable, Cratylan world of flux. Sensibles

176 Cratylus 438b–439a. This is a fundamental, and almost certainly incorrect, notion underlying most of the philosophies of language, at least before the 20th century.

177 Cratylus 390c, 423b–424a. The aim is to “imitate in letters and syllables this being or essence that each thing has.”

178 Metaphysics 1010a12.
are knowable and can be named, insofar as they participate in the Forms.

This answer to our question will not do, though. The refutation of Cratylus does not require Forms for natural kinds. Plato argues in the *Cratylus* that we need stable natures and essences to give names to if we are to be able to utter truths, but presents no reason why particular sensible rabbits may not provide such stable unchanging natures in their own person. Perhaps it will be suggested that rabbits change, but they do not do so as regards their rabbit-nature—they don’t change into porcupines. If it is suggested that rabbits are in flux because they cease to exist after a while, this also does not seem a sufficient objection, since there might always be instances of rabbits (as Aristotle thought), and it misreads what Plato intends here when he talks of the sensible world being in flux. The Heraclitean flux referred to in the *Cratylus* is only a metaphor for the simultaneous presence of opposites in a thing, which can occur in respect of different times, but also may occur in different respects at the same time. But the rabbit is not, in the very moment in which it exists, also not a rabbit, even if it is a rabbit not entirely fulfilled. Nor is it ever not a rabbit, save when it is not at all. Perhaps it will be suggested that it is only an imperfect rabbit, and that may be granted, for it has not achieved everything a rabbit can achieve. But Plato does not make that point here, and it seems hard to adapt the point to his argument, for an imperfect rabbit is not a non-rabbit, and he needs it to be a rabbit and a non-rabbit at the same time to apply his arguments for the existence and separation of Forms to the case. The Parmenidean argument for unchanging essences defining each sort of thing we can think about and understand is not by itself enough to establish separated Forms of them. At least it is not enough if we see the problem in a Form subject to opposites to be that it makes a bad paradigm, because it is simultaneously opposed to what it is supposedly a paradigm of. We would have to advance an additional requirement on our paradigms, that they be always available for our use, and so eternal, if we want to argue that there must be separated Forms for natural kinds. In his later dialogues, as we shall see, Plato seems willing to do this. But it is not clear that he sees the necessity yet here, and it may be that he thought the argument as extended to natural kinds in this way implausible. It does seem that one could at least remember a now vanished paradigm and use it to identify things, as long as it is unambiguous, and Plato might well have thought that should be good enough, since we are depending on recollection of the Forms to understand things in any case. A sensible rabbit (or dinosaur) viewed in some past life should do just as well as a Form as a paradigm for Rabbit, and no separated Form would be needed.

Nonetheless, Plato thought there were separated Forms of natural kinds. The *Republic* states that the natural world is patterned on the Form of the Good, and that the kinds of things we find in it are patterned on Forms representing possible ways of realizing the Good, that is, possible ways of realizing a good life, the Good
being realizable only in a living thing, a thing with a soul, and therefore with purposes to be accomplished and functions to be performed well or badly. Thus natural kinds turn out, in the end, to be biological kinds, and they all have Forms derived from the Form of the Good. Here we may begin to see why, in the Cratylus, the Forms of names are so closely associated with their function. In the end all Forms are ideals, reflecting somehow the Good itself. The Form of a name will be, then, the ideal it is committed to, and which establishes it as what it is. But Plato does not argue for this position in the Middle Dialogues—he only presents it, and depends on whatever inherent plausibility it may have to gain our acceptance.

The opening section of the Parmenides presents a research program, a set of unsolved problems regarding the Forms, problems which are approached within that dialogue, and other later dialogues, but which were not treated in a satisfactory way in the Middle Dialogues that we are now examining. The solution to this particular puzzle can be pieced together from the Timaeus, Plato’s Pythagorean review of natural science, and the Theaetetus and Sophist. We will discuss these dialogues below, but for now we can note the shape of his solution to the question why there must be separated Forms for natural kinds. Plato thought that a satisfactory account of the natural world could only be developed in terms of what is known by reason. The senses simply do not tell us what is going on at a fundamental level. That means that what it is to be a Rabbit can be looked at from two angles. We can look at what kind of good a rabbit (that is, a rabbit’s life) is, and then, of course, we are talking about ethical Forms, and we have seen that these must be separated Forms. Reason’s understanding of the Good Itself must be brought to bear on the issue, and in the end, what is understood is a Good Itself. We can also look at how a rabbit is constructed, in order to realize this good, but then we rely on geometry and mathematical Forms, which we have seen must also be separated. The Form of the natural kind expresses the underlying structure which produces the appearances associated with that natural kind, as well as its characteristic effects on other things, characteristic actions, and the like. The plan for the underlying structure of a single given kind of thing, such as a rabbit, must be a single plan, which is exemplified wherever there is a rabbit, but, of course, it may not be quite perfectly exemplified. Now this (mathematical/teleological) plan exists even when no rabbit is around (given that rabbits are possible even when no rabbits are around), and it can be known independently of knowing any particular rabbit. Indeed, it is not known in

179 A different line of argument here might suggest that definition is of a thing as it is in itself, and so not of it as it is sensible and in relation to other things, so of it as it is separated from sensibles. Thus natural kinds of which definitions are given will be separated Forms. Now if we need to know how a particular behaves, it is adequate to see that it is like something whose behavior we can predict in the relevant respects. If it is pretty close to triangular, we can apply the geometry of triangles to it.
knowing a sensible rabbit, for sensible rabbits only remind us of it. So, as in the *Phaedo*’s consideration of equality, the knowing of the Form is a different thing from the knowing of the sensible sharing in it, and so the Form is separated from the sensible. The later dialogues argue in detail that these things are so, but this solution is presented in principle already in the *Republic*, and it is the account of knowledge and Forms in the *Republic* to which we will first turn.

10. FORMS AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE *REPUBLIC*

I thought that if this were so, the directing Mind would direct everything and arrange each thing in the way that was best. If then one wished to know the cause of each thing, why it comes to be or perishes or exists, one had to find what was the best way for it to be or to be acted upon, or to act.

Plato, *Phaedo* 97c. 180

The *Republic* is an ethical and political work, but in the middle of it Plato describes the education of the ruling class in his ideal state, and this leads him into a treatment of knowledge and the Forms. He opens with a distinction between knowledge and belief. 181 We have already seen that in the *Meno* knowledge was identified as a true belief with a correct explanatory account why the proposition believed is true. Plato does not change this view in the *Republic*. Here, his consideration of the relation between the two arises from a question concerning the ‘lovers of sights,’ people who believe that there is nothing to be known except sensibles, who we might call empiricists. Can they reasonably claim to have knowledge, say, of the beautiful or just? If not, and if such knowledge is nonetheless possible, then we need to see how these lovers of sight are wrong, and instruct our young leaders accordingly, for they must know what is just.

Plato argues that, since the sight-lovers believe there are only sensibles to be known, they can identify as the beautiful only things that are also not beautiful, and will agree that each of these things in some respects fails to be beautiful. In developing this point, he identifies three faculties of the soul, knowledge, belief or

180 Translation of G.M.A. Grube.

181 *Republic* V 475d–480a. For the interpretation of this difficult passage I rely on Gail Fine (1990) and Palmer (1999). For the different senses of “to be” in Greek, see, besides Palmer, Kahn (1966) and (1981). For other interpretations of these passages see, in particular, Vlastos, “Degrees of reality in Plato” and “A metaphysical paradox” in Vlastos (1973), and Annas (1981) Ch. 8, and Cross and Woozley (1964) Ch. 8, who read the argument in terms of existence alone.
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opinion, and error,\(^{182}\) and three things they are “set over,” respectively, what completely is, what both is and is not, and what in no way is. What Plato means, first, is that the object of knowledge, what knowledge is “set over,” is whatever is, that is, is true, and true without qualification, in all respects.\(^{183}\) So knowledge is possible concerning any member of the set of true statements. If the statement is both true and false in different respects (as “Josie is fast”) to know it, one must be able to qualify it by reference to the respect in which it is true (“Josie is a fast turtle”), and that means the statement one knows, which includes the relevant qualification, is entirely true. Error is a sort of belief set over what is false alone, and in no way true. This may seem odd, but upon reflection it makes sense. One is in error only to the extent that what one believes is false. So, again, the possible objects of error are statements that are entirely false, not true in some respects, and false in others.\(^{184}\) If the statement is in some sense, or under some condition, true, then one cannot be entirely in error believing it. But some statements are both true and false, in different respects, as we have seen. These cannot be objects of knowledge or error, but only objects of opinion. It is not intended that only that which is both true and false can be believed. The set of things of which there is knowledge is the set of complete truths, the set of things of which there is ignorance is the set of total falsehoods, and the set of things of which there is belief or opinion is the union of both these sets with the set of statements that are both true and false, in different respects.\(^{185}\)

Near the end of the passage,\(^{186}\) Plato makes his claim quite openly and unambiguously that each of the

\(^{182}\) Usually translated, quite misleadingly, as “ignorance,” but this is not a mere matter of not knowing, as ignorance may be, but involves being positively mistaken.

\(^{183}\) “What is” might also mean what is something essentially, or it could indicate identity, or it might mean what has at least some characteristics, or it could mean what exists, but given what he says here and elsewhere, this seems to be the only option Plato could intend if he means to say something he is convinced is true.

\(^{184}\) All this can be very hard to see in many translations, which render “error” as “ignorance.” Plato says that “what is completely [true] is completely knowable,” and “what is in no way [true] is in every way unknowable.” See Fine (1978) and (1990) in particular for the correct reading of this passage.

\(^{185}\) Plato argues that what is both true and false is “intermediate” between the true and false, and suitable for belief inasmuch as it is “intermediate” between knowledge and error. This has led people to think that sensibles are intermediate between what is and is not, and so unknowable. This is perhaps true, if taken the right way, but we shall see that Forms turn out to be intermediate as well, then, given that a Form will share in the Like and the Unlike, for instance. At least that is his opinion in the later dialogues. It may well be his opinion in the Republic as well, for Socrates says of the “good and bad, and all the forms,” that “because they manifest themselves everywhere in association with actions, bodies, and one another, each of them appears to be many,” this despite the fact that each is one. So even leaving sensible participants in the Forms out of it, the Form of the Good turns out to be many if there are several sorts of good thing, say the Just and Life. But, of course, the Good is One. (Republic V, 476a). This is unmistakably the same argument made in the Parmenides to show that a Form might be both one and many, quite aside from any postulation of sensibles.

\(^{186}\) 479a ff.
many sensible F’s is also not-F, at least in the case of ethical Forms such as the Beautiful and the Just, and relative Forms such as the Double and the Heavy, for natural kind Forms are not considered here. This, he thinks, is something the sight-lovers will readily accept. So we can use dialectic to bring them to a recognition of the Forms. A beautiful sensible is always in some respect not beautiful. So that means that it is the sort of thing of which one can have (correct) opinion, but, unless one recognizes the possibility that Beauty is something, so that we can straighten out the respects in which the beautiful sensibles are beautiful (they are beautiful inasmuch as they imitate Beauty), we cannot have the sort of account we need for knowledge, and so cannot have knowledge. The problem is that we cannot even express the statement that we know in such a way that it is free of falsehood. This is not to say that we cannot have knowledge that certain sensibles are in certain respects beautiful, but only that if we are to have such knowledge, we must be able to give an account of it, and that means we must be able to say in what respect it is beautiful, for knowledge is only of that which is entirely true. One does not know, or even believe, that which he cannot even express, and nothing entirely true about a beautiful sensible can be expressed without reference to the Form of Beauty, through its real definition.

Sight-lovers, then, cannot claim knowledge of beauty, not even the beauty of sensibles, because they cannot formulate an account of beauty that will always be true of beautiful things alone, solely in virtue of their beauty. Such an account must refer to and describe what it is to be beautiful and in no way not beautiful, a perfect paradigm of beauty. But they do not think there is any such thing to refer to or describe. Any account they formulate turns out to generate beliefs, possibly some true ones, but not knowledge, concerning the many beautiful things, for they cannot say why they are beautiful, since they cannot say what it is to be beautiful. They can only list beautiful things, perhaps making use of some more or less reliable mark of beauty to do so. Since knowledge of beauty, to do its work, requires such an account, since it can extend only to what is entirely true, the sight lovers, who claim that all belief concerns what is perceived alone, cannot allow that knowledge of beauty is possible. Only those who allow beliefs concerning the non-sensible Forms can do so. If knowledge is to be possible, there must be such Forms.

Well, then, what sort of account is necessary to obtain knowledge? In the Phaedo, we have noted

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When natural kinds are considered, Plato does not insist that sensibles can only be objects of opinion, even in the Republic, for a finger is a finger, and in no way not a finger, and so, as he says, it does not raise the sort of question that demands postulation of the Forms that beautiful and double things do among sensibles. Republic VII, 524b-d. Knowledge that this is a finger does not so obviously require that one know the Form of Finger as knowledge that this is a double requires that one know the Form of Double.
already, Socrates claims that when he heard that Anaxagoras held that Mind is the cause of all things, instead of taking it as Anaxagoras did, so that it is the relation of the world to the mind’s perception of it that is responsible for shape taken by the world, he took it to mean that mind directs the world, and, of course, has the good in mind when it does so. He was disappointed, of course, to find out that Anaxagoras gave entirely physical causes for everything. In fact, he argues, the real cause must be essentially active, and bring things about, and what the physicalist identifies as causes, Socrates thinks, are merely that without which the real cause cannot act. So the Form of the Good is basic to any proper understanding of the world.

But despite this, and despite the fact that he has just argued that the Forms must be knowable since sensibles are knowable, in Republic VI and VII, Socrates says that the Form of the Good is unknowable. Reflect on how we identify the good in the natural world. Always, we refer the good to some nature, so that we speak of the good for a human being or a horse, or for something else within the world, but if these goods have something in common by which “the good” can be defined, it is not easy to say what it is. Could the good tout courte, without reference to that of which it is the good, be simply a matter of being adapted to some purpose? Perhaps the Idea of the Good is simply the idea of the end of a teleological structure—but one hesitates to say this, for surely the structure in question would have to have a good aim, not a bad one, if this is to work. But then our definition will be circular. In the Timaeus, Plato postulates a Craftsman, who looks to the Form of the Good to make the universe, but he does not think he can identify the maker of the Craftsman and his material, the “Father of all,” and he does not conceive that the Form of the Good is made at all. He has no way to explain how something comes to be the way it is other than identifying a soul that makes it in imitation of the Good, and so he has no way to explain how that soul, the materials it works

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188 Phaedo 99b. A physicalist, of course, might suggest that a certain amount of motion has always been present in the world, and is conserved, as the Atomists did, or that some physical things naturally act upon others. Like Bishop Berkeley, Plato perhaps thought that a will was necessary for action, and action for change. In any case, he argues elsewhere that there must be a first cause of motion, and this first cause is soul.

189 I depend here in particular on Fine (1990) again, and Santas (1980). Just as the business of Forms being both one and many underlies the argument in the later dialogue, Parmenides, so this point about the apparent unknowable nature of the Form of the Good underlies the problems set in the last part of the Theaetetus. The late dialogues do not revise views taken by Plato in the Middle dialogues, they just clean up after them.

190 Unless, of course, a coherent (non-contradictory) account of the good in the world requires that all the different goods of different things somehow be reconciled as contributors to the good of the whole. This is a very tempting line to many philosophers, of course, but it is hard to see why one need get entangled in contradictions, simply through asserting that the good of one creature (cats) is the bane of another (mice). One does recognize a kind of conflict, of course, and a contradiction is a kind of conflict, but not every conflict is a contradiction (pace Hegel).
with, and the Good itself come into being.\textsuperscript{191}

In the \textit{Republic} we find a related discussion how the Form of an artificial kind occurs, in the course of an examination of the imitative arts. It suggests that “we customarily hypothesize a single Form in connection with each of the many things to which we apply the same name.”\textsuperscript{192} Of course, he means “name” in the sense in which he defines that term in the \textit{Cratylus},\textsuperscript{193} and so we could say he only means that if there is a Form, that is, these things form a single natural kind, then there is but a single Form. In any case, he introduces the example of the Form of Bed, which the bed-maker looks to. Clearly, the explanation why something is a bed is that the bed-maker looked to that Form, and intentionally made it like it. It would be reasonable enough to suppose it is a bed because of its function, and perhaps the manner in which it accomplishes it. So the Form is “in its nature a bed,” and a god makes the Form. Presumably this is whatever god makes human beings and contrives human arts so that human beings can lead their natural, artifact-centered life. Perhaps the same God also made birds, and designed a Form of Nest for them to look to. A “second” bed imitates (shares in) that nature and is made by a carpenter, and the artist paints a “third” bed which is an imitation of this imitation, for what he makes only appears as a bed but does not really serve the function of a bed at all, not even badly. Plato seems to identify the One Form here with the one intention behind things falling under that Form, so that a bed is something that is rationally intended, a sort of good thing.

The Good Itself can bring all things into a single system, since lower goods are good because of the way they contribute to the development of higher goods, and everything is good in the end insofar as it contributes to the good of the whole (both helping others to their good, and by achieving its own good), which is entirely

\textsuperscript{191} \textit{Timaeus} 28c.

\textsuperscript{192} \textit{Republic} X 596a.

\textsuperscript{193} Taking it that by “a name” he means the name as it occurs in the \textit{Cratylus}, the Form of a name picks out a natural kind, which we have discussed above. Plato never accepted the “one over many” thesis concerning Forms, that would make for a Form corresponding to every word that univocally (in the modern sense) names many things. See \textit{Politicus} 262a–d, for instance, which plainly denies that having a common denomination, such as “Greek,” or “Libyan,” is sufficient for the introduction of a Form. “Greek” identifies some part of humanity, but not genuine kind of human being rooted in a natural division of human nature into kinds, as “male” or “female” would. So the theory of Forms is not a general theory of predication, and what is intended by “name” here is not simply a predicate. Again, when we think of a natural kind, supposing there really is something in common to be captured by a real definition, a Form is needed, but not when we think of just anything. Aristotle points out that a mental image is sufficient to think of something, and in the \textit{Theaetetus} Plato seems to agree (discussing the “wax tablet”) as long as we have sensibles in mind. Apparently the image there must be caused by the sensible. So to think of a natural kind, we need something in the mind caused by the natural kind, and images alone will no longer do the trick, without reference to their cause. Aristotle would say that the concept is caused, through perception, consideration, theorizing, and the like, so that it is abstracted from sensibles, by the natural kind (substantial forms of that kind) it is of. Plato probably agrees, as I shall argue below concerning the \textit{Theaetetus}. 
realized, presumably, only in the cosmos itself taken as a whole. This is the strategy worked out in the *Symposium*. But although each lower good can be defined and explained in terms of its place in the teleological system, this way of explaining the good fails us when we reach the Good itself, the highest Good. We cannot say, right off, what good it is, and it has no place in any larger system. Perhaps we can say *what* it is good for, though, namely everything—and if the good for any given thing is always the same (say, living well), we might then make sense of the whole. Plato thought we should understand the Form of the Good if we once understood the whole universe and the way in which all its parts work together for the various limited and particular goods that is the aim of each. One can understand the Good only as it is embodied in a world and attained through countless limited goods, all interacting and fitting together into a larger whole. One could not give a definition of the Good, that is, a formula stating its essence. So this dialectical knowledge is not *dianoia*, but once we have observed that the Good Itself is the one thing every other good thing ultimately aims at, and grasped the whole, through its parts, sufficiently well so that we have grasped what each thing aims at and how all their different goods are inter-related and inter-dependent, then we have successfully understood what the Good is.

This means that Plato does not think we come to know the Good itself by some sort of mystical/intellectual experience of the Good, a direct vision of its simple Form. Rather, we can only understand it by seeing how it structures all things, and we can see this only by detailed investigation into the goods of particular things. We grasp the Form of the Good not by a simple vision, but rather by a comprehensive pursuit of dialectic in many fields, finally bringing them all together into a single interrelated system.

In *Republic* VI, Plato develops an analogy between the Good and the Sun. Just as the Sun makes things visible, so that they can be perceived by sight, so the Good makes things intelligible, so that they can be understood by reason. But he points out that the Sun not only makes things visible, it also produces the things

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194That this is in fact so, and it is not the case that the good of different beings turn out to have no connection with one another that would lead us to postulate a higher good embracing all, is not argued. It is a matter of faith, it would seem, and that a faith we shall see Aristotle did not exactly share. Perhaps it could be argued, by considering many specific cases of ecological inter-dependence of one being on another, and one being’s good upon another’s, and making it plausible that these inter-dependencies will be found wherever there are goods apparently conflicting, or irrelevant to one another. But Plato himself does not seem to make any moves in the direction of developing this argument, even if later Platonists often did. By the way, if such an universal ecological inter-dependence were shown, that would not be enough to show that it existed because the Good was guiding events. An ecology can arise “accidentally” through evolution.
in the visible world, and he holds that the Good likewise produces the intelligible world. The Good is not itself an essence, but the transcendent cause of all essences—that is, we cannot define the Good, but we still define all other realities only by reference to the way in which they are good or obtain the good. The issue is also approached in the *Theaetetus*, where it is argued that complexes can only be known as structures of simple things, and simple things can be known only by knowing how they enter into such structures. The Good, then, a simple thing, would be knowable, in the end, by knowing the intelligible realm, and seeing how the Good fits into it. But the Good, being simple, would have no definition of the sort complex things have. Aristotle, who rejects the theory of Forms, but inherits this teleological view of the world and tries to work it out without the Form of the Good, picks up the point in his *Nicomachean Ethics* I, though only in reference to a good human life—each part of the good life has value only in the total context of the good life, so that a pleasure is good only if it occurs in the right context, perhaps as a reward of virtuous endeavor, or as a pleasure taken in some person because she is known to be virtuous, and so on. But the whole of the good life cannot be shown to be good except by pointing to its good parts and the ways in which they mutually support one another.

With this much in place, Plato turns in Book VII of the *Republic* to a more adequate account of the stages by which a person rises to knowledge. He builds his exposition around two connected analogies, the Divided Line and the Cave, both of which he later explains in clear language. In these analogies he identifies four states of the soul.

The highest is *noesis* or *gnosis*, knowledge of the Forms, gained from dialectical discussion of the Forms themselves. Plato states that the point of dialectical discussion is to get at reality, to “take into account what each thing is,” as well as “to distinguish and separate the idea of the good from all else.” So it leads to an understanding of all things in terms of the good, characterizing each reality as a sort of good thing, and relating it to the more complete goods to which it contributes. It is sometimes presented as though its final outcome is an immediate grasp of the Good Itself, a kind of mystical/intellectual vision of it, but when Plato is doing

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195 The analogy is at *Republic* VI 507b–509d. The Good’s status as cause of the intelligible world is asserted at 509b, and at *Republic* VII 517b–c. One might wonder just how the Sun produces visible things, but it certainly seems that living things, at least, could not exist without the Sun, and the Sun does drive the processes of nature, including meteorological phenomena, and perhaps that is the intention here. Or perhaps the intention is somehow that without the Sun providing light (but surely it is not the *only* source of light) things could not be visible. To see things in the Sun, rather than the light of a fire, is, in Plato’s cave analogy, to understand them in terms of the Good itself, not in terms of some sensible good that is also bad.

196 This view of the knowledge of simple things is central to the discussion in the last part of the *Theaetetus*, as we shall see.

197 The Divided Line is at *Republic* VI 509c–511e, and its explanation in *Republic* VII 533c–534a. The Cave is presented at *Republic* VII 514a–517d, and explained at *Republic* VII 532a–533d.
dialectic instead of giving a mythical account, it seems the end of dialectic is simply the complete understanding of the complexity of the whole system, and, beyond the grasp of the whole system, there is nothing else to know about the Good Itself. Some take his myths seriously enough to expect a final, simple vision of the Good after all their dialectical labor (they expect, as Justin Martyr said all Platonists do, to know God). Others (Hegel, perhaps) take the myths more lightly, and assume the final, complete synthesis, to the degree we can attain it, is all there is to attain to.

The second state of the soul is *dianoia*, knowledge of the images of the Forms, one might even say of certain lower Forms themselves, but through their images. *Dianoia* does not look directly to the Forms as such, then, but it does depend on dialectic, a dialectic that deals with triangles and the like, that is, with the indefinite many (to borrow a phrase from the *Philebus*) falling under the Forms.\(^{198}\) So in geometry and those connected with it, which we said grasped something of reality, we see that they dream about reality, but cannot see it with waking eyes so long as they use hypotheses, and leave them untouched, being unable to give any account of them.

The hypotheses here are the assumptions or first principles of these sciences, which relate to the Forms, inasmuch as they depend on real definitions, but not directly to the Form of the Good, for they provide reference to perfect things imperfectly realized in sensibles, geometrical shapes and numerical proportions, examining the working of those perfect things through the assumption that they are indefinitely multiplied in particulars, particular triangles and circles, say. Like the Forms dealt with in dialectic, these forms, which can be multiplied through direct imitation in sensibles, are perfectly what they are, but they are only indirectly related to the Good or final causes, or to the efficient causes that actually drive events and produce things, that is, souls aware of the Good. The Form of the Good is realized in particular sensibles only through their direct imitation of mathematical forms, the Good being realized in such Forms inasmuch as they are ordered, but ordered in a way imitable, if only imperfectly, in physical things in space and time. The mathematical Forms are intermediaries between the world of souls and the Good, and the physical world. To consider these mathematical hypotheses or assumptions, one must not look for even more basic assumptions of the same sort, but see them all taken together at once, depending on an account of the reality lying behind them, and this requires dialectic. It is for that reason that Plato appears critical of *dianoia*.

If a man’s beginning is something he does not know, and the end and what comes between are

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\(^{198}\) These are, perhaps, intelligible (as opposed to sensible) particulars, the objects of mathematical investigation, such as triangles and quantities, as opposed to the objects of the investigations of natural science.
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constructed out of what he does not know, what contrivance can ever turn such consistency into knowledge?

Similarly, the knowledge of justice and beauty and other such varieties of the good, centering on the many beautiful things, an image of the perfectly just state, and the like, would be dianoia, and this seems to be the sort of knowledge sought in the Republic. All the theoretical sciences that develop explanations about sensible particulars from real definitions of their characters in sensible (physical, geometrical) terms, would fall under dianoia. The only way to remove the imperfections of dianoia is to use dialectic, “which destroys the hypotheses, going back to the very beginning, to obtain confirmation.” It destroys the hypotheses inasmuch as it removes their hypothetical nature, showing the reason why they are true, namely to realize the good as far as it can be realized in the sensible world.199

A further word on dialectic is in order, perhaps. Dialectic is identified in the Meno, the Phaedo, and here in the Republic, as the preferred method in philosophy. The method is first to move from something to be understood to an hypothesis that would explain it, and which is both necessary and sufficient for the thing explained to be the case. So, for instance, if we are to say whether virtue is teachable, the hypothesis that virtue is a form of knowledge would imply a sufficient answer to our question, and would be necessary for that to be the right answer, since only knowledge is teachable.200 So we hypothesize this. And then we search out the consequences of our hypothesis, and we may discover absurdities or contradictions among them, and in that case the hypothesis, as well as what is explained by it, must be rejected. In this case, it would turn out that virtue is not teachable, since it is absurd or impossible that it should be knowledge. In addition to this, if we wish to advance closer to real knowledge, we should seek a further hypothesis to explain our first hypothesis, and then examine its consequences. Proceeding in this way, we eventually hope to arrive at a hypothesis which is acceptable on its own, the first principle behind all this. The question now arises, of course, whether that first principle will be known by some kind of direct perception, or only because it makes sense of the whole mass of hypotheses and conclusions of which it is the beginning. Plato takes the second option in the Theaetetus, as we shall see.

199 For dianoia and noesis as discussed here, and the brief quotations embodied in these two paragraphs, see Republic VII, 533b-535a. A very useful discussion of the classical interpretations of this passage is found in Robinson (1953), whose translation I lean on here, though I do not reproduce it exactly.

Might we look only for a hypothesis that is sufficient to explain why one answer to our question is right, without insisting that it be necessary for that to be right? That seems much closer to what scientists do, since they often allow that there are several possible explanations for the phenomenon that interests them, each sufficient to explain it, but none necessary, since the others are available. They look, not for the one necessary and sufficient hypothesis that will explain the matter, but for the best explanation (the one with non-absurd and empirically confirmable consequences) among the many they can think of. It really does seem to be the case that Plato, in his dialogues, pursues hypotheses that are necessary to explain what they explain, though, as is clear in the example of virtue’s being knowledge. This means that Plato’s dialectic is not to be considered a version of scientific method, for in it the connection between the hypothesis and what it explains is conceptual, or a priori. Plato expects to identify what must be the case to explain why virtue is knowledge, and so to argue from what is to be explained to its necessary explanation. Upon reflection, we shall find he is quite consistent in this pattern of argument. What dialectic gets us is not science, but metaphysics. There must be Forms explaining it, if knowledge of sensibles is to be possible, and if Forms explain it, the Form of the Good must lie ultimately behind the explanation.

Plato does mention this scientific method, which does not quite amount even to the pursuit of dianoia as in mathematics, by seeking out necessary explanatory hypothesis without pressing all the way back to first principles, since its hypotheses are not necessary for the explanandum to be true. In the Phaedo Socrates remarks on a second-best method, since he found himself unable to pursue his explanations back to the Form of the Good, namely to take as his hypothesis “the theory that seems to me most compelling,” and pursue its consequences, apparently regarding it as true if he ran onto nothing untoward. Here the hypothesis seems to be sufficient to explain, but not necessary to do so, for there are other theories, it seems, less compelling. Pretty clearly, this could be a first step toward genuine dialectic, which requires a hypothesis necessary to explain, but it is not genuine dialectic.

Below these two sorts of knowledge, we find the realm of belief, pistis, which includes beliefs about sensibles that are not formed by dialectic, but involve the understanding that these sensibles are realities, with real essences, distinct from their appearances, through which they come to be known. These beliefs may not recognize Forms, but they do recognize that there is a reality, as opposed to its appearances. In this realm we find the sciences “concerned with men’s opinions and desires or with productions and manufactures, or aimed
at the care of what grows and is manufactured.”

The fourth and lowest state of the soul is *eikasia*, beliefs presupposing appearances alone, of the sort ordinary people might have who assume there are no objective ethical truths, when they speak about the good and virtues. This is the sort of thing attended to by the Sophists. The simile of the Line asserts a certain proportion among these four, so that *noesis* is to *dianoia* as is *pistis* to *eikasia*, and as the first two together are to the last two together.

The first term in each of these proportions is like knowledge of the original, while the second term is like knowledge of a copy or imitation of the original. If we recognize the copy as such, we can study it with a view to the original, and thus arises perception. An important question here is what the nature of this imitation is. Plato’s view can look quite odd if we insist that imitation involves some sort of qualitative similarity. Even if perception involves images qualitatively similar to what is perceived, it seems quite difficult to imagine that Forms, particularly the higher Forms, Forms such as the Good and the Equals, presupposed in every specific science or *dianoia*, are qualitatively similar to the many that share in them. The Form of the Good is imitated in a certain respect by the Form of Rabbit, which is a mathematically constructed realization in the physical world of a certain kind of good, that is, a certain kind of good life, for every good comes down, in the end, to a kind of good life. But the Form of the good life of a rabbit does not qualitatively resemble the complex geometrical structure in matter which is a particular rabbit. Rather, that structure explains why the thing that has it acts, in its context, so like a rabbit. So the relation between the two bears a certain similarity to the relation between a model and its image in the artist’s studio. The artist looks to the model in shaping his image, the parts of the image which are accidentally connected (the splotches of paint arranged two-dimensionally on the canvas) are rooted, with their accidental connections, in a real (three-dimensional) unity in the model, the effects (appearances) of which they reproduce. The souls dwelling in the heavens in the
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Timaeus look to the Form in constructing material rabbits, and our minds understand the construction of the material rabbit only by seeing how it imitates that Form in making it, producing a structure that acts like a rabbit, while the various accidentally associated features of the rabbit’s structure have a unity only inasmuch as they reflect the real unity in the Form.

Now even the picture of a rabbit is called a rabbit, though, if we are careful, we recognize that it is not one. ("What is that? I could never make out Cubist paintings." "It’s a rabbit. Look, see the long ears there, and its whiskers there?") In the same way, we use the same word for the Form of Rabbit which falls within the Good, for the structure of a rabbit, for the sensible individual that realizes that structure, and the image of that individual, which, for Plato, stands in for the purely sensory aspect of our sensory grasp of the rabbit. If one takes it that the appearance is all there is, that there is no reality of some very different kind behind it, then one is like a person who takes a picture of a rabbit to be a real rabbit, since it presents the right appearance. So Plato likens those who believe only in sensibles, or worse, only in appearances, to those who would discuss the pictures or images of things as though they were the things themselves. In any case, it seems clear that the picture of a rabbit is not a rabbit, for all that we call it a rabbit, and so the image of a thing, the image in the sense in which individual material things are images of the Forms (or of the Forms’ mathematical images), are not really what they are named at all. The name properly belongs, not to the item most familiar to us, but to the item which is causally fundamental, that upon which they are modeled. So the Form is really rabbit, and sensible rabbits are rabbits only by sharing in the Form.

All of this is filled in by the Allegory of the Cave. Plato imagines a cave in which people are fettered against a wall. The only source of light is a fire (standing for the common conception of the good), and objects are carried along a rampart above the prisoners, the fire casting shadows of these objects on the wall they face. Having never seen anything else, they take the shadows to be reality, and become quite skillful at identifying them and predicting how they will behave. This is the level of eikasia, the shadows being mere images of sensible things, understood only in terms of the common conception of the good, which has replaced the Sun in this lower world, an artificial conception contrived by human beings. In particular, these people are like the lovers of sight, inasmuch as they take it that sensible appearances are the only realities. So they take whatever appears to be good to be really good, that is, they take the good not to be an objective reality, but rather whatever it is that they themselves might be pleased by. Pleasure becomes the standard. Their understanding of the world is in terms of its contribution to what they regard as good, and the superficial relations of appearances to one another. They lack the notion of an underlying theoretical account that would refer to the
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Good Itself sought by the cosmos, and something not sensible making sense of the sensible appearances. Socrates remarks that the prisoners are like ourselves, that is, just as they see only the shadows, we, in this bodily life, are aware only of sensory appearances. This is the sort of understanding of the world advanced by the Sophists. If one of the prisoners were freed (that is, came to consider that there were realities and deeper explanations in terms of non-sensible realities), then he would be dazzled and alarmed, until his eyes had accustomed themselves to the light of the fire. The point is that he would directly consider the notion of the good we have, from which our picture of the world is evolved, rather than simply letting it do its work in shaping his understanding of things, and this direct consideration of one’s values and the recognition of their apparently arbitrary nature, is quite disconcerting when first it happens. Then, if asked to say what each of the objects being carried was (that is, asked to say what each sort of thing really is, after the manner of Socrates), he would at first believe the shadows more real than the actual objects that cast them. When he understood his error, he would enter the second stage, *pistis*. Here one recognizes that there are realities as well as appearances, and that the realities may well be very different from the appearances, and that they deserve the names they receive more than the appearances do. He would not willingly abandon his subjective conception of the good, the fire, though, and would have to be dragged up to the surface, where he would at first be dazzled by the sun, and be able to make out only shadows, and then images in the water, and only last of all things themselves. The vision of the shadows and images, and even of the things themselves, is *dianoia*. The knowledge of the mathematician is especially limited, for it penetrates to the real structure of things, but can take into account neither the good nor causation, which is rooted in the actions of souls in pursuit of the good. It does, however, displace and improve upon the “knowledge” based in the subjective notion of the good. He is in contact with the real world that stands opposed to our subjective wishes and desires, that is what it is, no matter whether we like it or not.\(^{302}\) The cave is, therefore, no doubt a friendlier seeming place than the real world he has been thrust into, even if it is also narrow, and comparatively ugly. He may give a physical account of things, as of the heavens, but to do so he must hypothesize certain motions and tendencies associated with the mathematical structures he discovers, motions and tendencies he cannot explain himself. Moreover, even in pure geometry, he hypothesizes that there are the various sorts of figures, the three sorts of angles, and so

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\(^{302}\)Perhaps it is pressing the analogy too hard, but one might say that the fellow in the cave, who is looking at the objects themselves in the firelight, and forming opinions about them, thinks of them as they relate to human desires and aims. He is seeing the object in the firelight. *To really see the objects objectively*, he must leave the cave, and view them in sunlight, that is, he must do mathematics and theoretical science.
forth, and then works from these principles, and it is sensible figures that remind him of these things and suggest the first principles to him. 203 He does not relate his principles to what is prior to them. 204 The vision of the things themselves (the Forms), and last of all, the Sun (the Form of the Good), is noesis, the stage at which one at last is able to form a full understanding of the world, knowable reality as a whole, because one understands not only its structure, but the reason for that structure, and the souls which pursue the Good and give it that structure.

Thus Plato in the Republic gives a place of honor to the four-fold mathematical studies of Archytas the Pythagorean, 205 but he does not allow that it completes the study of philosophy, even if it rises above the natural world to the intelligible. The Pythagoreans made no distinction between mathematical studies and dialectics rooted in the understanding of the Good and the Forms. Plato adopts the Pythagorean mathematical view of nature, but the Pythagorean view becomes a preparation for a dialectic of the Good and natural causation, and a dialectic of Unity and Difference, not the end of studies. The natural world cannot be understood by mathematics, or even by natural science, dianoia, alone. 206

203 Note that Aristotle, like Plato, thinks it is all right to get one’s first principles from the figures in geometry (Posterior Analytics I 4).

204 Republic 510b–511b, on geometry, and 533b-d, 534 bc, on the way in which these hypotheses are established by Dialectic from the Form of the Good. On the hypothetical nature of geometry see Mueller (1992) and Robinson (1953). At 530a-c, Plato remarks that astronomy should be studied as a branch of mathematics, through “problems,” that is, problems in kinematics and the like, and we should leave the things in the sky alone. The aim is to discover which numbers form consonances and the like, so as to uncover the good, in the form of mathematical structure, in things, not just to discover the ratios found in the phenomena empirically. He extends this interest in making the sciences mathematical to harmony (530de), and complains of an empirical approach to that science, studying actual musical performance (531bc). There is something troubling about his insistence that we should focus on constructing the best possible, the most mathematically regular, systems, ignoring deviance from these systems as a failure of nature to live up to the ideal. It is even more troubling to see Plato’s reason for doing this. He seems to think that the reconciliation of observation with theory here is too difficult to pull off, although the theory is all right, and recommends that his young men be trained only in the theory, so that they can become familiar with the Good (530c, 531c). But perhaps it is not so troubling if we note that he does not want to make the young men, who are destined to rule the state, into scientists, but only to acquaint them with some of the results of the sciences, and that he defers in this passage to the scientists themselves for those results. The hypothetical nature of geometry is mentioned also at Meno 86c–89d, where Socrates asks for the hypothesis that virtue is a sort of knowledge, and at Phaedo 96a–102d, where Socrates hypothesizes (at 101c) that each object comes to be X only by participating in the Form of X. Here he specifies that the hypothesis can be tested by the consistency of its consequences with one another, and its own consistency with more ultimate hypotheses.

205 I.e, arithmetic, geometry, kinematics (= astronomy), and music.

206 Note, by the way, that Plato refers only to certain limited areas in which the mathematical understanding of the world he seeks is available, to some extent, in his own time, astronomy and music, most particularly. He does not say so, but presumably he thinks that mechanics, meteorology, chemistry and the rest also allow of a mathematical understanding. It is just that we don’t have it yet. Our successes, however, give him faith that these other natural sciences are there to be discovered, and he gives some plausible accounts of them in the Timaeus.
But despite this, it is the same world, it seems, that is understood through mathematics and through the Idea of the Good, and each of these approaches provides its own complete account of the world. That is, the mathematical account does not leave anything out that the account which the Good then adds—rather the understanding rooted in the Good provides another view of the mathematical world. The Good is realized in the mathematical harmonies, and most fully reflected in the world as a whole. At least, this was certainly a point found in Plato by later Platonists, even if we might hesitate what Plato himself intended, and it is the root of a great deal in Western Philosophy. In particular, it suggests an image of the mind-body relation that keeps recurring in Western thought, that the physical and the mental account of a person’s life are somehow each of them complete on its own, and somehow each reflected in the other. The Form of Soul presumably reflects the world as a whole, as we shall see Plotinus make explicit, and the individual soul provides mathematical form to the individual body, which is shaped from already formed, mathematically comprehensible, materials shaped by the Form of Soul. This suggests that Plato, though a dualist, holding that there are both souls and bodies in the world, also takes it that the two are somehow united, in such a way that neither is forced from its own nature—indeed, the soul provides the body with its nature. It might be objected that the body interferes with the working of the soul according to Plato, particularly in his notorious discussion of this matter in the myths of the Phaedo and Phaedrus, but the Timaeus suggests that evil arises not from the natural, mathematically intelligible, action of natural bodies, but from the inability of space, the receptacle for the Forms, to completely realize the mathematical order. The matter that underlies evil is not the material stuff of the natural world, but a metaphysical posit, a pure, and ultimately not quite adequate, potentiality for rational order and the good. Evil falls short of the natural. The disorder in the soul is matched and introduced by its failure to order fully the body in the material plane. Evil and vice is simply unintelligibility, the failure of the world to become completely ordered. So the natural material world is a reflection of the world of souls, and a mind-body parallelism, rather than opposition, governs it. The opposition between pure matter and the Forms, which keeps the souls from fully informing their bodies, is not the mind-body opposition—it falls under dialectic and metaphysics, not natural science. Looked at in another way, one might trace vice to the fact that Soul is multiplied in matter, and so the individual souls, each with their own viewpoint, fall into egoism when they focus on perceiving themselves and other individuals, and lose sight of the Form of the Good Itself. This picture makes evil an inevitable outcome of the individuation of souls, and their inadequate response to the task of ordering the individuals in their charge. It seems to be rooted in a psychological principle, though one triggered by the individuation of souls, and can be blamed on matter only because matter is the agent of
individuation, not because it drags the soul into vice. The soul falls into vice due to its own inattention to the
good, and matter only provides an occasion for that inattention. We will see all this worked out repeatedly
in later Platonists, not only Plotinus and his many followers in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, but Spinoza
and Leibniz in the 18th century, and, for that matter, Hegel in the 19th, and explore many variations on it. But
let us return to our consideration of Plato himself.

The stages of knowledge in Plato’s Republic recur in the Phaedrus. That dialogue concerns rhetoric, and
in it Plato offers three examples of speeches corresponding to eikasia, pistics, and dianoia. In the first speech,
which Phaedrus has obtained from Lysias, the speaker attempts to persuade a boy that he would do better to
team up with someone who did not love him, than with someone who did, presenting a barrage of more or
less plausible arguments, rooted in common notions of what is good, but in no consistent theory of the matter
and no recognition that common notions or appearances might not reflect reality. The second speech,
presented by Socrates, represents the Socratic level of accomplishment, pistics. Socrates begins the speech with
a theoretical account, a definition in the Socratic manner, of love, so that he can determine whether one who
loves the boy will benefit or harm him. Again following Socratic doctrine, it is suggested that a person is
governed by two principles, a desire for pleasure, and an inborn ability to judge concerning what is best.²⁰⁷
What Plato says here is quite consistent with the account we have given of Socratic ethics—that is, it may well
be that the best is to be measured in terms of pleasures and pains over the long haul, and at least it seems the
best is defined in terms a sight-lover from the Republic would approve. The speech is devoted entirely to
showing how much harm the lover will do the boy, given that he is directed in all his actions by his egoistic
desire for his own pleasure. In particular, he will take no trouble to educate the boy or to help him grow into
an independent young man, for he will want to keep him dependent. Socrates never turns to praise of the non-
lover (something Lysias had balanced equally with his criticism of the lover), and probably this is because Plato
does not see how, on these principles, one would expect the non-lover to do much better. It is true, perhaps,
that the non-lover will want to use the boy rather less, but there is still no principle of altruistic behavior in his
makeup. The whole situation was foreshadowed in an earlier remark, when, referring to eikasia, Socrates points
out the uselessness of attempting theoretical accounts of non-existent mythological creatures, and confesses
he prefers to pass his time considering his own self: “Am I a beast more complicated and savage than Typhon,

²⁰⁷Plato, Phaedrus, 237de.
or am I a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature?\textsuperscript{208} Typhon is a mythical beast with a hundred heads of different animals, which Plato uses as an image of the desiring part of man’s nature, the part that seeks bodily pleasures.

When we pass into the realm of dianoia, the lack of altruism is remedied. Socrates, warned by some Divinity in the sacred grove where he and Phaedrus are carrying on their discussion, undertakes a second speech, in which he now praises the lover, working from an entirely different explanatory account what love is. He allows that it is a kind of madness, inasmuch as it leads one to do things that are not calculated to maximize his pleasures over the long haul (not aimed at anything a sight-lover would acknowledge as real), but sometimes the best things come from madness, when madness comes as a gift from a god.\textsuperscript{209} One sort of madness is mantic, and leads prophetesses and priestesses to utter truths not attainable by Socratic reason (perhaps as Diotima does in the Symposium). Another sort provides relief to families beset by hereditary crimes, leading them to purification. A third is the madness involved in art and the appreciation of the beautiful. All of these sorts of madness are rooted in the soul’s recollection of the Forms, which it saw while in the company of the gods when it was not in the body. So Plato’s suggestion is that recollection of the Form of the Good and the various Forms falling under it can lead one to prophesy, that is, to perceive truths which are obtained through the senses, but come from divine realms. It can also lead to purification, that is, this recollection of the good can lead one to turn away from a vicious cycle of utilitarian calculations within a community of egotistic fellow utilitarians, rooted in the search for ever more intense and addictive pleasures, and to turn away from the pursuit of power and pleasure, and to a more universal good that transcends the sight-lover’s egotistic calculations. In the third place, the vision of the Good is what one is obscurely reminded of when one perceives the beautiful, including one’s lover, and when reminded of it, one is led toward a regrowth of the wings of the soul, which will enable one, in the end, once more to view the Forms beyond the outermost sphere of the universe. The central point is that the recognition of an objective account of the Good undermines egoism, for now the Good is sought, not merely one’s own pleasure, and not one’s own good, either, but the Good in general. Thus one perceives the Good in the boy and then naturally strives to increase the resemblance of the boy to the remembered Form, and so one strives to benefit the boy, leading him to become the best human being, leading the best life, possible. Dianoia leads not only to an understanding of the world, but to a reform

\textsuperscript{208}Plato, Phaedrus 229d–230a.

\textsuperscript{209}Plato, Phaedrus 244a.
of the Socratic ethics, basing a new ethic on an altruistic love of the Good that leads one to an altruistic love of others, and a desire to realize the Good as far as possible in the lives of all human beings, not only one’s own life.

And where does noesis occur in the Phaedrus? It does not occur in this life at all, but in the vision of the Forms obtained when the soul is free from the body. This seems to suggest that noesis involves some faculty of the soul which provides a direct intuition of the Forms, a faculty that, in the immediacy of its perception of the Forms, cannot fail to get them right. But one must take account of the fact that the whole tale of the flight of the soul is a metaphor, and the flight is accomplished through dialectic, at its best assisted by recollection. One rises through the natural world to the edge of it, from which one can see the Forms, if he “sticks his head outside,” that is, considers the simple natures such as the Good and the One that are presupposed and left unexplained in any natural account of the world. When Plato descends to consideration of the details of an actual account of the thing, the picture of immediate awareness drops out, and is replaced by the outcome of dialectical investigation. Perhaps the dialectical investigation can never actually be completed, though, and later Platonists such as Plotinus typically take it that Plato intends it to be capped by a vision of the Forms which it prepares. Perhaps, if we insist that no aim can be pursued if it is not finally actually attainable, not merely conceivable as the limit of some real process—and this is a view Plato may well have held—then we can argue that the myth of the Phaedrus is to be taken seriously, as the only way in which Plato can point to what is otherwise unintelligible, even if it can be shown to exist, the final culmination of dianoia in a simple, direct gnosis of the Good itself.

We will soon examine the difficulties Plato identifies within his theory of Forms, and the ways in which he answers them, in the later dialogues, the Theaetetus, Parmenides, and Sophist, before going on to look at his account of the cosmos and the natural world in the Timaeus and the Philebus. In preparation, let us stand back and assess the Theory of Forms, and Plato’s argument for it, as we understand it so far, for although difficulties are canvassed and addressed in the remainder of Plato’s works, the fundamental argument in favor of the separated Forms has now been presented, and no improvements are suggested later. That argument begins with the observation that the knowledge of the Forms is a different knowledge from the knowledge of sensible particulars, and so it must have a different object. Then it is argued that this object cannot be in particulars in any reasonable sense of the word “in.” There are two important rejoinders that might be made to this argument.

The first would be the reply of those that don’t hesitate about the reality of the Forms, but, like
Socrates, think they are to be found in sensible particulars, not separated from them. Such people could surely insist that Plato has shown that we have knowledge of something that is not sensible, and that our knowledge of this does not come through the senses, but he has not shown that the thing we thus know is separated from sensible things, for it is perfectly possible that sensible things should have some properties or components that are not sensible. Water is sensible, the atoms composing it are not. A lodestone is sensible, but its magnetic properties are not. There is no good reason to suppose that what is sensible can only have sensible properties. This is the position taken by Aristotle, for instance, who holds that substantial forms help constitute particular sensibles, but are not themselves sensible. How might Plato reply? As in the Parmenides, he would point out that Rabbit itself cannot be in a particular rabbit because it would then have to be in, and constitutive of, all the other rabbits, as well. In terms we shall see developed in later philosophy, he would deny that there are real universals, such as rabbithood, to be found simultaneously in many different things of the same sort, such that they constitute the essence of these things. The Rabbit Itself must stand outside of the particular rabbits because it must stand in some relation to many of them at once. It is one standing over the many, as he often puts it. Now each of the many rabbits may, and Plato seems to think each does, have an instance of the Form of Rabbit within it that is indeed non-sensible, the mathematical structure that makes this particular Form a rabbit is in fact in this rabbit. Moreover, it is not clear that Plato thinks that there must be some single mathematical structure here found simultaneously in many things. What he does think is that this structure is known and in fact depends on a general consideration, not drawing on particular sensible rabbits, how the life of a rabbit could be realized in matter, and the Rabbit Itself, a separated Form, not particular rabbits, is the object of this consideration. The many sensibles must be considered to arise from the Form of the Good, for the Form of Rabbit is the Form of one sort of good life, and if it does not actually arise from this Form, then our knowledge of rabbits based in the Form is a delusion. If the Form is merely our contrivance, we never leave the Cave at all, and see only shadows cast by the fire. This causal connection between the Sun and the things in the world below it must be real, or knowledge is not possible. This reply, of course, ties the theory of Forms to Plato’s teleological view of the world, his view that the nature of things is rooted in their realization of the Good Itself, which stands outside them and independent of them as their cause.

Now Aristotle responded to this, as we shall see, by arguing that the soul of the rabbit, if taken to be a real, non-sensible thing in the individual rabbit, and capable of shaping matter according to the plan needed to lead its sort of life, and of reproducing itself to provide souls to the rabbit’s offspring, will serve Plato’s purposes here quite well, making knowledge possible, without separation of the Forms. The Forms, that is,
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the souls, are in the rabbits, a separate rabbit soul for each rabbit. The rabbit souls are all perfect instances of rabbit, just as triangles in geometry are each perfect instances of triangle. Even though each is a separate, individual, rabbit or triangle, each is capable of serving as a paradigm and model for all rabbits, and serving as the foundation for a general conception of rabbits or triangles, which is the only thing common to all of them. We draw our conception of Rabbit from the individual rabbits by considering what it is that these have in common that explains their appearances to us. For recollection of the Forms, we substitute abstraction of a Form from multiple particular instances that we perceive. (We must be able to conceive Rabbit, of course, and I think Aristotle explains how we do this by suggesting that we understand Rabbit through its likeness to ourselves. Somehow we are immediately aware of ourselves.) So it seems that the separation of the Forms, and the unity of the Form expressed in all its instances, have not been established by Plato’s argument. Aristotle is committed, by this response to Plato, to a rejection of some features of Plato’s teleological view of the world. He no longer views the “final cause,” the good aimed at by a functioning soul, as a single Good for all the different sorts of souls, and he no longer takes it that the world arises by the activity of a rational Craftsman looking to the Form of the Good. Aristotle no longer assigns the universe a beginning, not even metaphorically, as Plato does in the Timaeus. Final causes are firmly distinguished from efficient and material causes, and the presence of real potentialities in things due to their souls, or “substantial forms,” takes the place of the purposes of the Craftsman as the cause of their displays of teleological structure. The potentialities of a given soul are inherited from those of the soul from which it sprang, and its potentialities from the soul from which it sprang, and so on back through all eternity, with no one ever designing souls or the world in the first place.

The second possible rejoinder to Plato’s argument would lead us to the kind of skeptical empiricism we have found already in the Atomists, whom both Aristotle and Plato attack. Here both abstraction and recollection are rejected, cognition is treated as a special sort of perception, an entirely material process, and it is insisted that there is no teleological structure at all to be uncovered in the world. We perhaps invent such structures, and find that we can read them into the world, but this fact is to be explained by evolutionary theory or some analogue of it, while the facts are that the only true account of things must restrict itself to material and efficient causes. We can do mathematics, and the analysis of value concepts, in our armchairs, but we need observation and experiment to discover natural kinds, for they are part of a causal order. To some extent we have to grant the Skeptic what he wants. We will have to guess, and test out our guesses against what they are supposed to explain, and pray that the world is simple enough so that we can make the right guesses. Even after we seem to have had a real run of success, we will not be able to say with certainty that we are right,
or perhaps even close to right. There is no magic road to knowledge of reality. Perhaps there is no road at all. This goes much further than Aristotle, of course. Aristotle supposed, like most of the Greeks before him, that we are like the world and can know the world by knowing ourselves. We can know our own souls, and this is a clue to the rest of it. An empiricist of the sort envisioned here will attempt to understand the soul in terms of what he knows of observable natural causal processes. It is not the clue to all things, but only one more puzzle to be solved by constructing theories that predict and explain experience.

I do not point out these oppositions now to resolve or explore them. There will be plenty of opportunity for that as we examine later philosophers who try to make these views work. I only want to make it clearer, by setting it up against its opposition, what Plato was saying, and why. Plato, like most thinkers, becomes clearer to us if we can make out what the alternatives are to his views, the alternatives he wishes to avoid.

11. THE SOUL AND IMMORTALITY

And is life worth living for us with that part of us corrupted that unjust action harms and just action benefits? Or do we think that part of us, whatever it is, that is concerned with justice and injustice is inferior to the body?

Plato, *Crito* 47e.²¹⁰

Socrates had argued for a unitary human soul. He thought that a human being could not hold contrary beliefs at one and the same time, and he insisted that every desire was, in effect, a belief about what would be best. Thus he saw the human personality as a unity centered on a single, continuing, rational consciousness, with nothing in itself hidden from itself or at variance with itself. In contrast, traditional Greek views presented a very old picture of the human personality as a collection of spiritual entities, powers and tendencies, some unaware of the others, and many in actual or potential conflict with one another.

This picture has sometimes been identified as *Shamanistic* in origin, so that it would have had its roots in the Eurasian steppes north of the centers of civilization, from which it radiated outwards in late pre-history. That outruns the evidence, but the picture certainly has a world-wide distribution, and seems to be far from the only possible picture one could have, given the creative accounts of the mind by later scientific

²¹⁰Trans. G.M.A. Grube.
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psychologists. So it seems likely the picture did originate somewhere and spread from there to the rest of the world. If so, the Shamanistic story of its origins is as good as we have.

For example, the Shamans of the Oglala-Dakota tribe of American Indians held that a person is composed of: (1) A *nagi*, a spirit provided by the Great Spirit which is the center of one’s personality—the *nagi*, after death, goes to the Spirit World along the Milky Way if it is worthy, and, if it is not, wanders about as a ghost stirring up jealousy and other mischief among the living; (2) A *niya*, which is one’s life and breath, has the power to influence others, and after death returns to the star from which it came at the person’s birth; and (3) a *sicun*, a power from one of the great Wakan spirits which serves as a guardian spirit, enabling us to do what beasts cannot, and providing courage and fortitude (rather like the Roman *genius*). These are all found in the body, which has an additional spirit in it providing the power of motion, which comes from the Great Spirit.\(^{211}\)

The Maori of New Zealand similarly identified three psychic parts to a person: (1) an eternal element which is the soul of a god; (2) a ghost-shadow that goes to the underworld upon death and is responsible for connecting us to our bodies—this is a passive power, and is the portion of us that is attacked by magic and subject to pollution; and (3) an ego that disappears at death. The ego was further divided into a dynamic element enabling action, a set of dispositions amounting to the personality, and the breath, which imparts life to the body.\(^{212}\) This scheme is very like Plato’s three-part soul, and seems to share its motivation, namely, working out the assumption that an immortal soul initially unassociated with the body enters it and rules its life from elsewhere, making use of various temporary intermediary souls between itself and the body to communicate the body’s affairs to it, and intervene in those affairs. What we might nowadays call “substance dualism,” a view usually introduced in our classrooms through Descartes, is so old and widespread that one is tempted sometimes to say it is instinctive.

Multiple souls are found among the Ancient Egyptians, a Ka, a divine spirit conceived as constituting part of a person, and a divine protector, an Akh, which could take on different forms and appeared after death as a ghost, and is sometimes identified with rationality or intellect, and a Ba, represented in a bird-form, which carried on the after-life in a more or less bodily way in the underworld and the Boat of the Sun. The Ba traveled outside the tomb after death, and so brought back air and water to the body, which represented yet another

\(^{211}\)Radin (1927) 265-268.

\(^{212}\)Radin (1927) 260-263.
piece of the whole individual. Perhaps the preservation of the body was intended, originally, at least, to retain a person’s individuality after death, by keeping the body and its earthly life connected to the Ba, which would otherwise simply carry on without memory or retention of identity. Certainly, the body is identified as one component of the individual, not a place in which one’s real spiritual self dwells, and it seems likely that the body was the source of individuality. The Ib, or heart, was formed from a drop of blood from one’s mother and was the center of desire and intention, and the subject of the moral impulse. Here much of the scheme must have evolved late to account for funeral practices and their associated mythology. Moreover, the account we have is an amalgam of various pre-dynastic traditions, conflicting with one another to various degrees, all of which had to be fit into the official picture, and so the whole system seems to verge on incoherence at times.

The traditional Ancient Greek view as it stands in Homer and other early poets identified three psychic parts in a person, the psyche itself, which seems to be responsible for life, that is, for holding everything together in the individual, and departs to the underworld upon death, the thymos, which is responsible for one’s desiring and active nature, and is often thought of as a multiplicity of different desires or drives, different thymoi, and the noos, which is responsible for thought and intellectual insight. The psyche in Homer is attributed only to human beings, and when an animal dies its thymos, rather than a psyche, goes to Hades. Perhaps the psyche was not source of individual personality, which would rather be the thymos, but it does seem to have a kind of immortality, and so came to be identified as a persisting self to which more temporary breath-spirits were attached. It is breath, but a cold breath associated with the head, and it appears to others in dreams. Thus it is identified with an image or shadow of the dead man. The thymos is fundamentally impulsive, but it makes sense to talk to it or attempt to persuade it, for instance, to restraint. It is a hot breath soul. One breathes his thymos forth at death, and it seems to dissipate once freed from the body. In times of grief it wastes away. It is centered in the heart and lungs, but carried to the limbs in the blood. The gods sometimes breathe menos, a power to perform difficult and honorable deeds, into one’s thymos. The noos is likewise located in the chest, and is responsible for understanding and recognition. The whole system in Homer seems to take it that each psychic part is a form of breath, warmest near the heart, and coldest farthest from the heart, desiring when warm, more enduring when cool. Heraclitus identifies the hottest soul-stuff as the most intelligent and insightful, and seems to think it rejoined the outer cosmic fire upon death, rather than

For this material, see Dodds (1951) Ch. 1, Onians (1951), Snell (1953) Ch. 1, Adkins (1970). Note that the Greek view was pretty definitely materialist, making every part of the soul a breath of one sort or another, so that one’s personality resided in the lungs.
making the cold part of the soul surviving in Hades the self, and we have noted that he probably draws on a different tradition than Homer did.

These views see many souls because they see conflict within the personality, not a single point of view resulting in a single judgment of the good, but multiple conflicting desires and disparate abilities, each with its own quasi-independent point of view, a self, however momentarily. Their diverse perceptions and capacities put them in conflict with one another, each focusing attention and action in a different direction. Each is a possible center for the personality, an independent being that might well lead its own life before or after they are all joined in the body that holds them together. This does not mean that one’s self is never identified with one of these fragmentary bits rather than another. For instance, at one point in the *Iliad* Odysseus is left alone to face several enemies, and debates whether to run away or stand his ground. He offers his *thymos* reasons in support of running, but then he recalls an appropriate principle of right behavior and stands his ground.214 Here the *thymos* is a desire with which Odysseus is not identified, but with which he must deal. It is wavering, and the self (apparently a *rational* self, but not one identified here with any particular part of the breath soul) endeavors to sway it to the right action. But even if it is not identified with himself, this desire might have, in the end, determined his action, an action for which Odysseus would then have been responsible.

Implicit in the picture, then, is the notion of a rational, central personality which is to be identified with the self, but may not always be in complete control of a person’s actions. Whether there is personal immortality rests on which of these fragmentary souls (if any) is the true self, and (a different question) which of them survive the body and go on to a new life after death. In the course of the 6th and 5th centuries the *psyche* came to be more and more identified as the central self, and to take on the functions of *noos* and *thymos*, so that its future life, if it was not envisioned as a matter of a half-conscious existence in the Underworld, might constitute something like a complete human life. In particular, by the 5th century the *psyche* had come to be viewed as a locus of virtue, so that it had the function of directing and restraining the *thymos*, and one who had a strong soul was capable of self-discipline and resistance against panic (courage) and the temptation to excess (self-restraint, justice).215

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214 *Iliad* 11.402 ff. It should be noted that Odysseus was especially known for his rationality and thoughtfulness, and so the identification of the central self with the rational part may not always be appropriate to the Homeric mind.

215 Burnet (1915-16) asserts that only Socrates in 5th century Athens seems to have used the word *psyche* to mean something that both bears the central, rational personality, and enjoys life after death. But his view is blinkered, and it is clear now that these features of the *psyche* were widely accepted. See esp. Lorenz (2009) for many citations from 5th-century literature. For Plato’s and Socrates’s conception of the soul in general, see Lovibond (1991).
Plato’s account of the soul in the Middle Dialogues reflects these popular views, abandoning Socrates’s belief that there was one central viewpoint constituting the person, from which every action and perception was derived. That is not to say that Plato did not regard the soul as one’s real self, nor does it mean, as we shall see, that he did not regard the soul as ultimately a simple unity. Indeed, on the first point, he is emphatic that it is the soul, and not the body, that is one’s real self, whose interests are to be taken into account if we are to be benefitted. This is clear, he thinks, because the soul controls and uses the body, which is therefore not the self, but something the self uses for its ends.²¹⁶ It is also clear from the accounts of the afterlife in the Phaedo and Phaedrus, which tell us that the soul, as the Pythagoreans thought, goes through many lives, with a new body each time. This suggests that one survives the destruction of the body, and so cannot be the body, and the soul that survives this destruction is held responsible for a person’s actions, for which it is punished or rewarded between lives, and so seems to be the true self. Again, in the Republic it is suggested that to be just is to do your own work, but what is your own work? It is, it appears, to cultivate the self, to develop oneself into as good a person as possible. What is the self that must be cultivated? The soul, not the body.

Plato argues that this soul is immortal. This, if a popular view, was not was strongly held by most, as the opening of the Phaedo makes clear. Socrates has to argue against the current, drawing specifically on the Pythagorean tradition, to establish his view, and even after the introduction of Pythagorean notions, those present have their doubts. A brief argument is presented in Republic X,²¹⁷ to the effect that the evil that is natural to the soul, namely lack of virtue, cannot in fact destroy the soul, as sickness can the body. Moreover, death does not make a soul more unjust, and so death does not destroy the soul. The idea is that the soul, in its own nature, is not part of a natural order in which it is destroyed or comes to be, even if it is associated with things that are destroyed, namely the body. The soul is distinct from the body, and uninfluenced by material processes that destroy material things. Moreover, it is not subject to any evil of its own that tends to destroy it, but only to injustice and vice. None of this is argued in the Republic, only stated. Plato does suggest that the key to the nature of the soul is its love of the Forms, to which it is kin, and that like the Forms, the soul is unchanging—but that only hints at how he might try to show the nature of the soul such that it is immortal.

The Phaedo makes up for the lack here, making a great effort to demonstrate the soul’s immortality.

²¹⁶This is implied elsewhere, but stated openly in First Alcibiades 128e-130c, which was probably written by a member of the Academy about 350, just after Plato’s death. Again, see Crito 47e.

²¹⁷Republic X, 608d–612a.
In the dialogue, Socrates spends the last hours before his execution talking to his philosophical friends, including several with a Pythagorean background, and argues that the soul is immortal, in order to substantiate his claim that the good man will suffer no harm from death. He begins with the assertion of an afterlife, and is challenged, on the ground that the soul may be destroyed when it leaves the body. He replies, first, by arguing from the natural laws governing change, which, he asserts, ensure that any given reality will always arise from its opposite, if it has one. So the larger arises from the smaller, the worse from the better, and the hot from the cold. This should apply to the living and the dead, so that the living arise from the dead, which can only happen if the body gains a soul at birth coming back to the world for another life.

The argument seems to rest on a confusion between two sorts of change, what Aristotle called accidental and substantial change. Natural law may well specify, as Aristotle suggests in his *Physics*, that an accident of a thing arises in that thing only when it begins the process in an opposite state—so a tall thing comes to be tall only if it begins as not-tall, that is, short. But destruction and coming-to-be are not accidental changes of this sort. No underlying object remains throughout the process to take on a new quality. Rather the underlying subject is itself destroyed or created. If something does remain through the process, it is the matter making up the underlying object, but this is not the thing, but rather a quantity of stuff that makes up the thing. If there are any laws about destruction and coming-to-be, they will specify that the right matter must be present, and perhaps some organizing principle to shape the matter, but not that the thing that is to come-to-be is there already, only in a state of not-being. Perhaps it can be objected that the organizing principle must be the soul, and so the soul must be around beforehand for a bodily person to come to be, but Aristotle suggests that the soul may be produced by another soul, the soul of the father, which has the ability to reproduce itself in appropriate matter, in the same way that some qualities have the power to reproduce themselves in appropriate matter, as the heat of the fire reproduces itself in the poker. On that model, the matter might be said to be ‘dead,’ that is, not the matter of a living being, before it becomes the matter of a living being, and so ‘alive,’ but that is loose speaking. The new human being is alive, and will someday be dead, that is, will no longer exist. She does not alternate between two qualitative states, death and life. This possibility is enough to show this line of argument a bad one, and, what is more, it is to be suspected that Plato himself was aware of its inadequacy.

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218 *Phaedo* 69e–70b.

219 *Phaedo* 70c–72e.
A second line of argument is then presented, one we have already seen in the *Meno*, for it is the argument that we recollect the Forms, and so our souls must have existed before they were in our bodies, since they must have experienced the Forms. But Plato ran the argument in the *Meno* somewhat differently than he does in the *Phaedo*. There he argued that one is always in a state of having recollected what one never has actually experienced, something that can happen as long as there is always, for any given recollection, an earlier recollection to base it on. In the *Phaedo* it is observed that this argument is not conclusive, since it does not establish that the soul must always persist, that it cannot wear out like a cloak worn too often, or somehow disperse, in the future, but only that it always existed before our birth. Moreover, it is not even clear that the soul always existed, since the *Phaedo* seems to allow that a recollection may be based on an actual experience of the Forms while one’s soul is free of the body and its senses. Indeed, perhaps there must have been such an actual experience at some time, and an infinite chain of recollections based only on earlier recollections is not supportable. In that case, we have the picture presented in the *Phaedrus* of the soul glimpsing the Forms between births, and we cannot assert that the soul had to exist before this experience of the Forms.

A third line of argument is then introduced, which points out that the Forms are unchanging and eternal, and this is probably because they have no constituent, separable parts, for they are immaterial and do not occupy space, and so cannot be broken up. A Form is not what it is because of the arrangement of its parts, as natural things imitating the Forms are. The Forms are also intelligible, but not sensible. The soul is, like the Forms, non-sensible, and it is related to the Forms inasmuch as it can understand them, something nothing without a soul can do, and so it may seem likely that it is also incomposite and eternal, though, of course, it is not unchanging. Moreover, understanding the Forms requires that the soul dissociate itself from its body, and what it attains to when it understands is a kind of invariance. Finally, the soul rules the body in something like the way the Forms rule the world, that is, the soul is what gives point to the body’s actions, and provides it with goals and purposes, with a teleological structure. So the soul seems likely to be eternal like

220 *Phaedo* 72e–78b.

221 *Phaedo* 79ebc.

222 *Phaedo* 78c–79c. Elsewhere, we shall see, Plato suggests that if the soul is subjected to change, in one way, by coming to know a Form it did not know before, then we need to grant that the Form changes too, when it comes to be known. So Forms are not entirely unchanging. But they still seem at first blush to be unchanging in ways that the soul is not, which perhaps bears on their indestructibility. But we shall have to look at this business in view of the *Parmenides* and *Sophist*, and the *Timaeus*, much more closely below.

223 *Phaedo* 79e–80b.
the Forms, but, of course, there are similarities as well between the soul and material things that can be destroyed—most particularly, the soul is a particular individual and subject to change in ways Forms are not. It might also be objected that the soul does have parts, as it is argued in Republic IV, on the ground that there are conflicts of desires (and perhaps even conflicts of associated beliefs) within the soul. But in the Phaedo the body is responsible for its own desires. In particular, the soul opposes and masters the psychological states of the body,

holding converse with desires and passions and fears as if it were one thing talking to a different one. As Homer wrote somewhere in the Odyssey where he says that Odysseus “struck his breast and rebuked his heart saying, ‘Endure, my heart, you have endured worse than this.’”

In the Homeric passage indicated Odysseus’s heart, as his spirited part, is angry with Penelope’s maids for their disloyalty, but Odysseus sees that it is not wise to reveal himself yet, and so controls his anger and will not act on it. In the Republic this anger would have been assigned to the spirited part of the soul. One might wonder if a person survives if only his understanding does, and his desires, his memory of this life, his emotional makeup, sense of honor, and the like, do not also survive. If the soul does have parts, though, there is no obvious reason why the different parts of the soul with their different characteristic desires should not come apart, as Plato himself observes in the Republic.

“‘We must not think,’” he says, “‘that the soul in its truest nature is full of multicolored variety and unlikeness or that it differs with itself… It isn’t easy for a composite of many parts to be everlasting if it isn’t composed in the finest way, yet this is how the soul now appears to us.’”

Perhaps the soul is pre-adapted to rule the body, and therefore has parts capable of desire and anger when joined to the body, which remain non-functional when it is separated. (If so, the irrational parts still give the rational part trouble, holding it back from the Forms, when the soul is separated, according to the Phaedrus, but perhaps that is not due to their passions, but only to their mere presence, drawing the soul back toward the body.) But Plato’s latest thoughts, in the Timaeus, suggest that only the intellectual part of the soul

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224 Phaedo 94cd, referring to Odyssey 20.17-18.

225 Republic 611a10–b7. Note that the position taken in the Timaeus, that the rational soul is composite, but is composed in the finest way, of the finest materials, by the most consummate artisan, and so is in fact indestructible, is left open here. There is no reason to believe that the account of the soul in the Timaeus was not already developed at the time Plato wrote the Republic.

226 Phaedrus 246a–250c.
survives. We will come back to this in a moment.

For now, let us return to the *Phaedo*, where new objections are raised next, on two fronts. First, the soul may simply be the arrangement of the part of the body, so that when this ‘attunement’ is no longer present, the soul is also no longer present. Socrates replies to this that a mere attunement or arrangement would have to come into existence with the body, and so we would have to deny recollection of the Forms if this were what a soul is. Moreover, an attunement could not ‘rule’ the body, but rather would be whatever it is depending on how the body was, and so be ruled by the body. He conceives the soul as imposing itself on the body and shaping it, and this in conformity with some pre-existing standard. So the kinship of the Soul to the Forms, its “divinity,” accounts for its ability to rule. It imposes a standard, and must somehow know or embody the standard to do so. In the third place, such an attunement must admit of a further attunement, for justice and the virtues are an attunement of the parts of the soul to one another. (This, of course, presupposes that a soul does have parts.) It seems that Plato thinks something that is constituted by an attunement would not be capable of such a further attunement. Perhaps the reason is revealed when he

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227 Timaeus 69cd.

228 Phaedo 85c—86d. The view seems to be that of some group of Pythagoreans, but we know nothing about them except from Plato. Its significance, perhaps, is that the body’s attunement is an imitation of the eternal Forms (or eternal mathematical entities, at least), without itself being eternal. So something more than a Theory of Forms is needed here to establish the soul’s immortality. The soul cannot be a mere attunement.

229 Phaedo 91e—92c.

230 Phaedo 92c—93a and 94b—95a. It should be noted, and Plato was surely aware here, that an attunement of one body, which is in and controls another, might be said to be the source of the other body’s attunement. This seems to be what is intended in the *Timaeus*, where the soul has a material basis, but a very pure one not like that of the sensible body, but like that of the heavenly bodies, and the rational soul, that is, this moving material in the movements of which the mathematical order of the soul is found, is found in the body, as fire might be in the iron.

231 If one objected that the Form of Human Being might produce the attunement in the body, and serve as the standard, Plato would be inclined to say that this Form is the soul, then, since it is doing the work of the soul. Then there would be only one soul for all human beings. But as he conceives it, this soul produces many individual human souls like itself, each of which directs and shapes a given human body to be as like itself as it can manage to make it. A different objection might look to the rulership of the body as a matter of controlling the body, and point out that we can sometimes identify its structure as a cause of a body’s behavior. Perhaps an antecedent cause would be whatever produced that structure, of course.

232 Here we may see an analogy to the argument in the *Phaedrus* that the soul is immortal because it is the ultimate source of its own motion, and of the motion of all other things. It is the ruler.

233 Why not? It looks as if he thinks every attunement is an attunement of parts, but the attunement itself does not have parts, only what is attuned by it does. A clever theoretician could surely argue that a complex enough attunement might have parts that are themselves attunements, and distinguish that from the case in which the same parts were attuned more closely to one another. One might instance the organs of a body as involving such sub-attunements of the tissues making them up, and point out that each organ
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remarks that, since attunements admit of degrees, it would seem that one body might have more of a soul than another if souls are attunements. The view, no doubt, is that the body imitates its soul, as things do the Forms, and its attunement in fact is the result of this imitation. It can, of course, come closer or not so close to getting it right, and so the attunement admits of degrees. The soul itself, however, is, like the Forms, precisely what it is, it is not what it is to some degree. Looking to the Timaeus, we might conjecture that the soul is not an arrangement of parts in a body, but an activity realized in a body, a complex array of circular motions. I shall leave the discussion of this account of the soul to my discussion of the Timaeus, but it should be noted that there is no reason to suppose that Plato was not already committed to it when writing the Phaedo.

The second objection is that the soul has not really been shown to be immortal, but only to be longer lived than the body. Socrates must draw on the full apparatus of the theory of Forms to craft an answer to these powerful objections. He begins by establishing that when something has a characteristic, the correct account why it has it is that it imitates the Form of that characteristic. This is essentially an assertion (no proof is given) of the teleological character of the world. A physical explanation how the situation came about will not do all by itself, for these events would not have happened in this way if there had not been some goal for them to attain. Things move, we might want to say, only because souls, with goals in mind, make them move. They do not move on their own. But although Socrates says all this, he does not use this highest level of explanation to establish the soul’s immortality. Rather, he suggests the principle that each thing is what it is by imitation of its Form, which he describes as a hypothesis, and makes use of this level of knowledge, dianoia, without tracing the hypothesis through dialectic back to the real explanation, to be found in the operation of the Form of the Good, drawing all things to itself. He proposes that not only is the Form of Largeness in every

might be fine in itself, even though the person was ill because they were not properly attuned to one another. I suppose Plato could rejoin that such a sub-attunement would have to constitute an individual organ, in this case, and so the parts of the wider attunement are not attunements, but only things which are constituted by attunements, as is the whole, but that does not open up an obvious way out of the objection made.

Note that this matter of not having degrees is one thing that separates substances (particular things) from qualities in Aristotle’s Categories.

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234 Phaedo 93b–94b. This seems very weak—surely they might have better or worse souls, and a gradation from flourishing life to death, indicative of different degrees of attunement, is not hard to identify if one wants to identify it. Below a certain minimal level of attunement things fall apart, and decline becomes death. Or one might argue that there are two different sorts of attunement in the same matter, one constituting the living thing, the other presupposing the first and constituting health or virtue.

235 Note that this matter of not having degrees is one thing that separates substances (particular things) from qualities in Aristotle’s Categories.

236 Phaedo 87b–88b.

237 Phaedo 98b–99d.
way large, and in no way small, but so is the ‘largeness in us,’ the character of largeness found in a particular person. This character found in a person must either retreat from its opposite when it comes to belong to the thing, so that it is now found elsewhere, or be destroyed. So fire may retreat from a thing that becomes cold, if it migrates to another object, heating it up. Snow can never be hot, but snow will be destroyed when heat approaches, for it is not, like fire, something that can withdraw from the object it is in and move elsewhere. Now soul carries life in the same way that fire carries heat, bringing life to whatever it is found in. The soul, therefore, will not admit death, the opposite of life, but will either withdraw from the thing that becomes dead, or be destroyed when death approaches. So the soul never admits death, and is immortal.

Here, perhaps, we ought to ask what the life of the soul is. If it is the understanding of the Forms, so that the truly living soul is its rational part alone, from which the rest is infected with life and consciousness, then this awareness or understanding of the Forms perhaps withdraws from our bodies when death approaches. Our survival may be nothing more than the eternal undifferentiated awareness in Soul Itself of the Forms, and involve nothing like an individual survival at all. The individual soul of a given person would turn out to be an attunement after all, of his body, which perishes with the body, even if we call it a soul because it is an attunement produced by the Form, Soul Itself. We shall find this view playing an important role in later Platonism.

Still, the argument so far has it that the soul might be destroyed, even if it does not come to be dead. The prospect of destruction seems as depressing as that of death, so can anything be said to rule out that possibility? But “it would hardly be said that anything else could resist destruction if the immortal, which is everlasting, would admit destruction,” and so “God anyway, and the Form of Life itself, and anything else immortal there may be, never perish…” (Once more, individual survival, it seems, might not concern Plato at all here.) This last stretch of argument seems at first blush indefensible. It does not follow from something’s being immortal, in the sense defined, that it could not be destroyed. Perhaps Plato thinks the soul must either be like snow, which it is not, since it carries cold and imparts it to that which it is in, and snow is not found in all other cold things, or else it is like fire, which, at least on the views of some scientists in his day, cannot be destroyed, but simply withdraws when the cold approaches. Still, that is only the view of some scientists,

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238 Phaedo 102de.
239 Phaedo 106cd.
240 Though it is in snowballs, of course.
and in fact Plato himself thought that fire, being composite, could be broken up into the triangles that composed its tetrahedral particles, and those triangles could rearrange themselves to make air or water. If fire is destroyed, it would not thereby become cold, of course, though we might say that it is no longer hot, not because it has changed, but because it no longer exists at all. Similarly, a soul might surely be destroyed without becoming dead, for it will no longer exist to be dead. If it is objected that it certainly follows from something’s being destroyed that it is dead if it was living when it existed, then we need to ask why the soul is supposed to be deathless, given the possibility of its destruction, even if it is the carrier of life. Either the assumption of indestructibility is sneaked in under the assumption of deathlessness, and that begs the question, or it is not sneaked in, and then the soul might well be deathless while failing to be indestructible.\textsuperscript{241}

So did Plato think that the argument at the end of the \textit{Phaedo} established the soul’s immortality? Perhaps he thought it did, if we take into account the soul’s simplicity, which would establish its indestructibility. Its simplicity in a certain regard follows from the fact that it carries life to a body, but, although embodied, has a body as no part of itself. The person dies, and that is because the person is compounded from body and soul. The soul is deathless precisely because it is not compounded, and for the same reason, it is indestructible. It is also argued in the \textit{Phaedo} that the soul is simple because it is akin to the Forms,\textsuperscript{242} being invisible, i.e. immaterial, though Plato seems somewhat wary of his conclusion, saying that the soul is indissoluble, or at least \textit{nearly} so. The problem dealt with at the end of the \textit{Phaedo}, in that case, is not the prospect of the soul’s destruction, which has already been ruled out by its simplicity, not the prospect of its no longer continuing to exist when separated from the body, but rather its becoming dead. The burden of the argument is to establish that it is not the soul that dies, but the body, when the soul leaves it, just as the fire does not cool down, but the iron, when the fire leaves it. If we ask what activity the soul participates in that would constitute its life after departing from the body, Plato seems to suggest that it understands the Forms, so that its intellectual activity, its intellectual life, continues.\textsuperscript{243}

\textsuperscript{241}The argument resembles the Ontological Argument for God’s existence, which asserts, on the ground that it is a defining or essential characteristic of God that he necessarily exist, that he must therefore exist. Here it seems that “God necessarily exists” either entails that God exists, in which case we have no good reason to assert it is true and the question is begged, or it only means that if God exists, then he exists necessarily, since that is part of his definition, in which case it simply does not follow that God exists.

\textsuperscript{242}\textit{Phaedo} 78b–80b.

\textsuperscript{243}This suggests Aristotle’s assessment of the argument in the \textit{Phaedo} in \textit{On the Soul} III. There he suggests that the whole question of the soul’s survival after death hangs on its being able to function in some way, even without a body, and the only way in which it might seem the soul can function thus after death, would be through its ability to understand eternal truths. So the question comes down to whether understanding of eternal truths can occur without the body, that is, without the presence of imagery (at least)
But did Plato think the soul is simple? There are reasons to hesitate. For one thing, Plato assigns to the soul three main parts, reason, the multitudinous bodily desires, and the reconciling part that loves honor. Nor are these parts there entirely due to the association of the soul with the body. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato likens the soul to a chariot, with a driver (reason), and two horses, one noble (the part that loves honor), and the other rather a poor beast, and hard to control (the non-rational desires). This chariot, in its natural state, has wings, and soars into the heavens and even rises so high that the charioteer can lift his head above the heavens and see the Forms. So it seems the parts of the soul are present even when the soul is separated from the body. The *Timaeus* presents a similar view of human souls, holding that they are pre-constructed, as it were, to rule a human body, and it adds further that the soul, even the world-soul, has its own material from which it is constructed, since it is a set of complex circular motions and such motions can only occur if there is some material thing that moves. The soul appears to be a subtle body within a coarser body, which is able to control and shape it.

There is another reason to hesitate whether Plato thought the soul to be simple—he confesses that it is subject to change, even if it is more stable than the body, and so in that way unlike the Forms. The *Sophist* seems to represent a situation in which certain “friends of the Forms” claim that the powers of acting and being acted on do not belong to real being. The Athenian Stranger, Plato’s representative in the dialogue, asks, Are we really to be so easily convinced that change, life, soul, understanding have no place in that which is perfectly real - that it has neither life nor thought, but stands immutable in solemn aloofness, devoid of intelligence?

Plato goes on to argue that the Forms themselves have being only insofar as they are understood, and to identify existence with the power to act. The “friends of the Forms” are, it seems, a group within the Academy Plato does not agree with, or possibly a literary abstraction representing a common misinterpretation of what Plato himself said in his earlier work.

It might be that Plato did not intend the continued life of the soul to be a matter of its direct awareness in which the understanding is expressed. He seems skeptical that it can, as we shall see.

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244 *Phaedrus* 246a and following.

245 It may be that this represents a change of mind from the *Phaedo*, which seems to identify bodily desires as belonging to the body. The *Phaedrus* and *Republic*, and all the other dialogues after, make out the ‘bodily desires’ to belong to the soul, and to form a kind of bond that ties the soul to the body. See Lovibond (1991).

246 *Sophist* 247d and following.
of the Forms without the senses when separated from the body, especially since he apparently rejects this as an account of understanding in the *Theaetetus*, as we shall see in the next section. Perhaps his intention was instead that a bodily life of the soul continue, in the continuation of the dialectical conversation which is its life, which is continued by other people after one’s death. In that case, he is identifying one’s true self with the intellectual activity of the soul, not with its body, and the argument is that this activity continues after the death of the body, the same activity (the same continued story), even if its realization is through different bodies. Thus the intellectual part of oneself continues and survives, even if not in separation from the body. This means that we should identify our real selves with that intellectual activity, not with the life of the passions and desires, or the spirit and its attention to honor, *nor with this particular body that the activity lives in for the moment*. “Personal” immortality, as we like to call it nowadays, is not at issue, then, but only the continuation of the life of reason, which is our truest self.  

This may seem to be small consolation to one facing death, but to assess that we might reflect on our current situation, in which even that consolation seems to be removed. We no longer think, as Plato did, that the world will go on indefinitely as it is now, with an endless continuity of human culture and philosophical activity. We expect that activity to end like everything else of any importance to us, and even face the possibility of its ending rather quickly due to nuclear war. Identifying oneself with rational human endeavor is no longer the consolation it used to be, and this suggests that it used to be, perhaps, a considerable consolation.

The proof given of the soul’s immortality in the *Phaedrus* elaborates on that in the *Phaedo*, but in the course of this elaboration it introduces a new line of argument. The soul is immortal because it is by its own nature always in motion, its motion being its life, for the soul is the source of motion in (in the *Phaedo*’s terms, the ruler of) all other things, and receives its motion from nothing else. So body, which moves only because it is moved by another, is alive only accidentally, and can cease to be moved, and so die. But soul, which moves of its own nature, and so always moves, cannot be separated from its life. Here, and in the *Laws*, Plato argues

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247 This reading is the one Peterman (2000) suggests, arguing that there are many indications in the dramatic side of the dialogues at least that this continuation is an *image* of the continued life of the soul after death. Why does Plato not say the thing outright? Perhaps he does not want to remove the consolation of the myth from those who feel its need. Or perhaps he is fearful of being accused of impiety.

248 If this is Plato’s intention, then a second, more serious, look at the Socratic discussion of recollection in the *Meno* may be in order. The departure of the Middle Dialogues into metaphysical speculation, pressing the importance of the Form of the Good, perhaps does not reject the Socratic position, but only expresses it metaphorically.

249 *Phaedrus* 245ce, *Laws* 890 f.
that there must exist an unmoved thing which moves of its own nature and moves other things, otherwise motion cannot be explained. There must be a first, moving, mover in any chain of things that are moved.\textsuperscript{250} The Athenian Stranger, who argues for Plato in that dialogue, uses this argument to prove that there are gods. The living soul is a divinity.

There is certainly a difficulty in this argument if its intention is to prove the immortality of an individual soul of an individual person. The argument is well adapted to show that souls must always have existed, but it is not immediately clear why any particular soul should have. If it is possible for a soul to be made by another soul, say, then the indefinite past existence of a particular soul would be called into question. The source of movement cannot itself have a further source, so if the movement of souls is the source of all movement it has no source, but that does not mean that the movement of a particular soul has none.\textsuperscript{251} But Plato’s argument here moves from the fact that the soul always was to its imperishability. (How does this follow? Perhaps if it were perishable it should have perished by now, since it has had an infinite time in which to realize this possibility.) So that there should always have been, and always will be, souls, can be concluded, but that this soul always was, or will be, cannot.

The difficulty here is interesting in part because it reappears in Aristotle’s discussion of the soul, in which he seems to argue that at most soul as such always was and always will be, not that any particular soul is immortal. Did Plato intend no conclusion but this, himself? If so, he presumably advises us that the rational soul is to be identified as our immortal part, so that the same rational soul is at work in all the various rational beings, though joined to various different desiring and spirited souls. The image of the chariot, with its horses corresponding to the non-rational parts, and the man driving it to reason, suggests, perhaps, that the rational soul, akin to the Forms outside the world upon which the man gazes when the chariot rises as high as it can, is the true self. If we were to identify its only true activity with its gazing upon the Forms, then perhaps no rational soul would differ from any other. But none of this is plainly stated. Perhaps Plato intended it in his poetic allegory, but knew that he had no arguments proving it. Perhaps this did not bother him because arguments are designed to lead us through nature to a vision of the Forms, but that vision is another thing than dialectic, and cannot be dealt with in discursive language. At least, this is what later Platonists made of his

\textsuperscript{250} Aristotle, let it be noted, argues for a first, unmoved mover, allowing an infinite chain of moving movers, and this is a significant departure from Plato. In particular, it undermines Plato’s argument for an eternal God or soul, for these are both movers.

\textsuperscript{251} Aristotle, \textit{On the Soul} I 2, 404a16, suggests that the Pythagoreans thought the soul was always in movement, but implies in his following remarks that they did not think souls were the only source of movement.
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views, and he certainly provided them with the material to construct this reading of the dialogues.

Plato holds that the life proper to the soul itself is rooted in its knowledge of the Forms, in particular the Form of the Good. The body interferes with the life proper to the soul, for the body is made alive by the soul, and the soul, in providing to it a bodily life, is distracted from its own concerns. But it seems that some bodies are more distracting than others, and the higher souls inhabiting the heavenly spheres and the stars have much less demanding bodies, whose essential life is found in their circular movements. It is noteworthy that such souls are the souls of much larger, more comprehensive objects than our souls are. They take in a great deal more of the world in their bodies, and so their bodies are more self-sufficient, and less isolated from alien forms of the good. It seems that these higher souls are permanently associated with their bodies, but lower souls leave their bodies upon death, and are judged, punished or rewarded before being assigned to new bodies. This talk of punishment and reward should perhaps be taken to point only to naturally occurring sanctions, so that a soul that has abandoned its knowledge and consideration of the Forms becomes bestial, and receives a body suited to it, while the philosopher’s soul gravitates to a human body, possibly after spending some time in the heavens, to which it is naturally attracted. But if Plato really means it when he says that there are divine souls in charge of the heavens, it would not seem to be unreasonable to suppose that there is a republic of sorts in the cosmos, and that these higher souls would take an interest in justice, and in instructing, rewarding and disciplining the lower. In any case, human souls are necessarily rational and capable of recollecting the Forms. When a soul returns to life on earth after the interlude following death, only those souls which have seen the Forms become human souls, the others becoming animals. It is clear that Plato thinks a part of the soul is naturally adapted to the body, and that the soul has a duty and natural inclination to realize the good in the bodily life. Plato probably viewed the Forms themselves, contained within the Form of the Good, as Life itself, since there is no Good apart from life, but they are not adapted to lead a life in a body, and so are not Soul, but stand above soul. Soul is crafted in the Timaeus to give form and purpose to

\[\text{This theme is most fully developed in the Phaedo. In the beginning, at 66a–69d, where philosophy and the pursuit of virtue is identified with the ‘practice of death,’ that is, of separation of the soul from the body. (Hence death is, for the good man, a great benefit, though not for the bad man, who has punishment followed by rebirth to look forward to.) At 80c–84b the distractions of the bodily life are emphasized.}\]

\[\text{So the myths in Phaedo 107c–114c (note Socrates's remark that he does not insist that things are exactly as he has said), and Republic X 612c–621b.}\]

\[\text{Phaedo 249b5-c4.}\]
bodies. Souls are the presence of the Forms in the bodies they inhabit, and although Plato speaks in terms of separation of the soul from a particular body, upon which that body dies, it is not at all clear that he thinks souls can ever be separated from a bodily life entirely. Perhaps they only move to other, better or worse, bodies.

And if so, this would be why Plato divides the apparently unitary soul into three parts, rather than assuming three different souls in the body. The highest part is “akin to” and can know the Forms, and should direct the soul in all its doings. It is characterized by rational desires for knowledge, and for the realization of the Good insofar as it is possible in the world of sensible particulars. This is the one soul, but considered insofar as it has the Forms in view. The lowest part is adapted to the body, and characterized by desires originating in the body, desires for satisfaction of bodily needs and sensory enjoyment, together with the operation of the senses. This is the one soul, again, but as it makes contact with and inhabits the body. The third part is intermediate between these two, and shapes our bodily lives by making us proud of living up to our image of the good, or ashamed of failing to do so. Here we have the one soul, as it rules the body. These different parts of the soul are capable of being in harmony, or of lacking harmony (Plato uses the musical analogy, no doubt drawn from the Pythagoreans, quite deliberately). If a soul is well tuned, so that its parts are in harmony with one another, then the soul is virtuous. In Republic X Plato argues that there are two sorts of harmony. In the one case, if the harmony (structure) is lost the thing dissolves, for the thing is composite, and the harmony defines the manner of its composition. In the other, when the thing becomes disharmonious it is not dissolved, but rather becomes bad. The soul’s disharmony is of the second sort, for it makes the soul vicious, so the soul is not a composite, constituted by its harmony. It is one, but, as an intermediary thing, joining the world of material sensibles and the world of Forms, it is, as it were, pulled apart to a certain degree as it regards the two worlds it lives in, and has, as one of its functions, resistance to this pulling apart, so that it holds itself together through internal harmony, which brings harmony between the part of the material world it inhabits and the world of the Forms.

Looking back to the Symposium, the soul is Eros, Love, which is not The Good Itself, nor what is to be

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255 Timaeus 35a–36c speaks of the world-soul and its construction to fit its body, while 41d–42e speaks of human souls. The gods here are presumably parts of the world soul governing the motions of specific spheres.

256 Republic X, 608c–611a. The argument presupposes that nothing can have both sorts of harmony, of course. It also fails to attend to the possibility that a minor disruption of harmony might create ill health, while a major disruption would lead to destruction. Our vices may only be minor disruptions.
made good or to be led to a good life, but what joins the two, something always, from the necessity of its own nature, in need, and incomplete. And so it makes progress toward the good and knowledge, but never quite achieves it. It lives in time, and not in eternity.

12. PROBLEMS WITH THE FORMS: THE PARMENIDES

Socrates: … don’t you acknowledge that there is a form, itself by itself, of likeness, and another form, opposite to this, which is what unlike is? Don’t you and I and the other things we call ‘many’ get a share of those two entities? And don’t things that get a share of likeness come to be like in that way and to the extent that they get a share, whereas things get a share of unlikeness come to be unlike, and things that get a share of both come to be both? And even if all things get a share of both, though they are opposites, and by partaking of them are both like and unlike themselves, what’s astonishing about that? But if someone showed that the like itself come to be unlike, or the unlike alike—that, I think, would be a marvel… if he should demonstrate this thing itself, what one is, to be many, or, conversely the many to be one—at this I’ll be astonished.

Plato, *Parmenides* 257ab.

With the *Parmenides* Plato launched an investigation of the theory of separated Forms from his Middle Dialogues, seeking to answer what had perhaps become standing objections to it. Parmenides is the leader in the dialogue, and Zeno is also present, and a very young Socrates, for once, is reduced to the role of respondent. It seems likely that Plato, in the persons of Zeno and Parmenides, means to criticize and suggest revisions to Socrates’s thought here. Whether Plato meant to criticize his own earlier thought has been disputed, but my view is that he does not, but means instead to guard against misinterpretation of it. A great

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257 Translated Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan, with some small modifications by the author.

258 The meeting of the two is, historically, perhaps barely possible, but it is generally assumed that the circumstances of the dialogue are fictional. The analysis of the options here is from Rickless.

259 Republic V, 476a, sets out the chief contention of the Parmenides, that the Forms are subject to simultaneous participation in opposites, in particular in the One and the Many. For the *Parmenides*, see especially Runciman (1959), Meinwald (1991), (1992), Gill (1996), Rickless (1998), (2007a), (2007b), and Peterson (1981), (1996), (2000), (2003). Gilbert Ryle, in a view that has been generally rejected, claims that Plato gave up the theory of Forms entirely in the *Parmenides*. Patterson (1985) and Sayre (1983) hold that Plato gave up the notion that Forms existed independently of objects participating in them. Sayre develops the view of G.E.L. Owen (1965a), who held that Plato gave up the notion that Forms resemble sensibles, and no longer viewed being and becoming as
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deal of the work of the dialogue is teasing out the exact meaning of the terms Plato has been using in his talk of Forms, particulars’ “sharing in” the Forms, the Forms’ “presence in” and “separation from” particulars, and the “imitation” of the Forms by particulars, and to get clear what qualifications must be placed on the theoretical claims made about the Forms, most particularly the self-predication assumption that the form of F is itself F, and the notion, that I think Plato never held, himself, that the Forms cannot have contrary opposites predicated of them, as sensible particulars can. The metaphorical terms, and the identification of the Forms as ideals and perfect paradigms that suggests them, began with Socrates, and the youthful ‘Socrates’ here takes the metaphors quite seriously, so it seems possible that Socrates himself held some such views as those criticized here. The role of the Eleatics in the dialogue suggests that Plato thought the basic motivation of the theory of Forms was already implicit in their work. Assessing the outcome hangs a great deal on whether the theory continues to make good sense, and to support Plato’s optimism about the Good, once the metaphors have been properly defanged, and all necessary qualifications introduced. I think it does.

The dialogue begins with Socrates, who objects to Zeno’s argument against those who say that all things are many. Zeno claims in his book, which he has just read aloud, that if all things are many, then each thing is both like and unlike; but nothing can be both like and unlike, and so things cannot be many. Socrates objects that things might well be both like and unlike, by partaking of the Like Itself, and the Unlike Itself at the same time. So he himself is one of the people present, and many inasmuch as he has many parts, a front mutually exclusive categories. More recently scholars tend to think that Plato did not abandon his theory of Forms, but was forced to conceive it more clearly, and altered some fundamental assumptions in it. So Prior (1985), and Meinwald (1991). Vlastos, in “The Third Man Argument in the Parmenides” in Allen (1965), held that Plato did not give up the theory of Forms despite the fact that he was aware of serious difficulties, and was unable to locate the source of the difficulties.

That is not to say I think it is true. A lot of things make good sense that are not true.

As I have read it in my discussion of Zeno above in Chapter 2, Plato intends the thesis that things are many, which Zeno attacks, to mean that each thing is many, so that nothing is one, except in the sense that it is a single collection of many. But, Zeno claimed, each sensible must be a one without parts, or, if a collection is intended, it must be made up of such ones. If I read the dialogue correctly, Plato thinks that the Forms are not just one, without also being many, any more than the sensibles are many without also being one, transferring the sense of plurality here from the possession of many parts to being characterizable by contrary predicates (so being more than one sort of thing, in an apparently contradictory way). I think Plato took it that Zeno had argued (or at least should have argued had he been entirely clear about what he was doing) that sensibles, being spatial and divisible into parts, were both one and many, like and unlike. Perhaps the introduction of the Forms resolves this problem, because these things are not one and many by themselves, but in virtue of imitation of the Forms of One and Many. At least that seems to be Socrates’s suggestion here. But now it is argued that the Forms too are, every one of them, both one and many, like and unlike. That suggests the introduction of Forms is not enough, by itself, to resolve the contradictions he seems to identify. Something more needs to be said.

He participates in the Form of Person, and is One person, so participates in the Form of One.
and a back, for instance.²⁶³ But, though sensibles share in opposites in this way, partaking in each in a different respect, Socrates confesses he would be quite surprised to find Forms do so. The One itself must simply be one, and in no way many, and the Short itself short, and in no way tall. A Form cannot, he suggests, have contrary properties at the same time, in different respects. All of this might seem to reflect the arguments for the separation of the Forms that we have already reviewed, but in fact that point is not at issue here, and the option that the Forms might be in some way in their participants is left open in the later discussion. What it does assume is that the Forms are knowable and distinct from one another, and, because they are knowable, each is whatever it is and in no way its opposite. Much of what follows is dedicated to undermining this assumption, and showing that Forms must in some way admit of contraries, just as sensible things do. But, of course, in some way they must not, as well, or else they cannot serve as Parmenidean objects of knowledge. So it becomes necessary to develop a more sophisticated account of the different ways in which Forms have a given characteristic if a contradiction in the theory of Forms is to be avoided, and this means taking a second look at the nature of participation in a Form, which does not seem to be any straightforward sharing in it or resemblance to it.

To complete this initial sketch, we should note that Plato had argued in the Republic²⁶⁴ that the Form for any given characteristic is in fact one despite there being a number of different things sharing in it. In the so-called “third bed” argument he argues that, to avoid an infinite regress (anathema to any Parmenidean understanding of reality), we must assume that the Form of the Equal, say, is equal, but not in virtue of participating in some other, second Form of the Equal above it and all the other equal things, but rather in virtue of itself. Let us call what a Form is a Form of, and whatever follows on that, the “exemplary content” of the Form. The exemplary content of the Form of Bed would be bed or being a bed, and would also include being (intended as) a sleeping platform, assuming that that follows on being a bed. The exemplary content of a Form may include references to things outside that which participates in it, for instance, a bed implies someone who profits from sleep. We are left with a picture in which the Forms possess their exemplary content in some special way that does not presuppose a higher Form which they share in or imitate. They do not possess their content by participation. The Form of Bed is not a bed by participating in the Form of Bed. Might Forms have characteristics that are not part of their content? It seems they must if a theory of what Forms

²⁶³ Parmenides 129c.

²⁶⁴ Republic X, 597cd.
are, and what participation is, is to be evolved. At the very least, the Form of Bed is a Form, different from the Form of Chair, just as the Form of the Same is different from the Form of the Different, and the same as itself. The problems raised in the Parmenides are directly related to this distinction between the exemplary content of a Form and its other, dare we say, participatory, characteristics.

Parmenides begins his list of difficulties with the Forms with the question how far the theory of Forms extends. The possession of what properties exactly is to be explained by reference to the Forms? Here Socrates confesses that there are surely Forms of ideal things, such as the Form of courage, of the beautiful, the good, and so on. In addition, he allows that there are Forms of those things that allow for arguments like that of the Phaedo and Republic concerning equality or tallness. Then he is asked about the Forms of natural kinds, human beings, water and fire, and confesses that he is very tempted to think there are such, but he has no clear argument to establish that there must be. Finally, he is asked about natural kinds that seem “trivial,” that is, that apparently cannot be brought under ideal notions, Forms such as Hair and Mud. Socrates states that he is quite sure that there are no Forms of these things, since they are trivial and have no share in the ideal, for “they are just what they seem to be,” and so are not, presumably, objects of knowledge. Zeno and Parmenides claim that he says this only because he has not yet been fully seized by the spirit of philosophy, and that he would allow Forms of such things if he understood better. He cannot escape, if he is really taken up by the spirit of philosophy, the assumption that the sensible world can be understood through and through, and is not ever just what it seems to be, for no reason, as the Sophists suppose. Thus things the being of which seems to hang on their being sensible (things that are “just what they seem to be”) must somehow be understood through what is non-sensible, in spite of Socrates’s claim that it is “too outlandish to think that there is a Form for them.”

This apparently means, as we shall see in the Timaeus, that the sensible world and its parts must somehow be understood as existing only in connection with realizations of the ideal, of the Form of the Good. But the point is not developed here. Here the job is to clear away difficulties, not to press the view to its completion in natural science. Nonetheless, one omission is to be noted here—Plato does not have Parmenides suggest that

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265 What word does Plato use for “Form” here? Well, sometimes idea, which suggests a concept in the mind, and reflects, I suspect, Socrates’s view what Forms are, sometimes paradeigma, which comes closest to being intended in a non-metaphorical sense. He has no word that is not metaphorical, and in fact often seems to avoid naming the Forms directly as such, working instead from examples, such as the Beautiful Itself, or speaking of what is knowable, or really named. He seems a bit nervous about characterizing the Forms too closely. Best, perhaps, would be to take them as knowables, thus contrasting them with sensibles.

266 Parmenides 130a-e.

267 Parmenides 130d.
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there are Forms of Forms, and he later raises difficulties with explaining the characteristics of Forms through their participation in Forms.

As for the view that Socrates himself expresses, it suggests that to his mind all Forms have something of the ideal about them, and that they are perhaps mind-dependent, it being minds that conceive and attach themselves to ideals, know them, and minds that classify things as one and many, same and different, in order to get some grasp on them (as in Anaxagoras). He is presumably very tempted to think that natural kinds are also ideals, but sees no way to argue it, and no doubt is hesitant about how minds could impose such ideals on things in such a way that they are not merely assessed, but understood. Rabbit does not seem to work like piety, or oneness. His doubts becomes certainty once the suggestion is broached concerning mud, for that is not any kind of ideal at all. To participate in a Form, for Socrates, is he to strive towards it, to aim at living up to it, and so to be shaped by it.

Socrates, has, then, a substantive view what Forms are, and allows that the possession of only some characteristics by some things is to be explained by the Forms. Much can be said about the Forms that is not explained as an assertion about its participation in a Form, then, and apparently things are said about sensibles as well that are not explained as an assertion about participation in a Form. At least some of the non-participatory characteristics of sensibles, moreover, are not part of the metaphysical apparatus of the theory of Forms and Sensibles, but rather everyday things, like muddiness. Zeno and Parmenides think that once he straightens his views out, Socrates will no longer deny that Forms are to be found corresponding to every characteristic found in sensibles. He will see the true nature of the theory at that point, that it explains what it is for a sensible to have a characteristic, not simply one way in which a sensible might have a characteristic. By way of anticipation, note that such a theory does not have to hold to just one way in which Forms can have something predicated of them, and Socrates’s difficulties in the dialogue rests on his failure to grasp this point.

So Parmenides presses Socrates for an account of the participation relation between things and their Forms. He begins by considering the pie model for participation—sharing in a Form is like sharing in a pie. There are two possibilities here, Parmenides suggests. The first is that each participant gets a share of the whole of the Form, so that the whole Form is in each participant. Perhaps this would be like joint ownership of the pie, though surely multiple owners could not each of them eat the whole pie. The second suggests that each
participant gets a part of the Form,\textsuperscript{268} so a slice of the pie, for his own. The problem with the first option, Parmenides suggests, is that it drives us to the view that a Form is simultaneously wholly in several different things, and so is “separate from itself,” which seems quite impossible.\textsuperscript{269} So we see the Socratic notion that Forms are in things associated with the notion that to participate in a Form is to share in it, and it is objected that the Form cannot be One in the appropriate sense if it is in many things in this way.\textsuperscript{270} It is not entirely clear what it is for a Form “to be separate from itself,” but it helps to think of water in several glasses. This can only happen if the water is separate from itself, that is, there must be some water in this glass that is not in that one. So we are making use of the assumption that water can be divided into parts, which might be taken to involve being separated from itself. But this would seem to make no sense for piety, say, or oneness, which surely have no parts, at least in any relevant sense. When Socrates accepts the criticism, he seems to confess that he needs to take the metaphor of “being in the thing” seriously enough to allow himself to be forced into this absurdity, if he is to gain from it what he wants, that is, an explanation what participation really is. It would be easy enough for him to say that this is just a metaphor, and we are pushing it too hard, but then he would be asked “what do you mean, then, literally?” and he has no answer. He relies on the metaphor’s pictorial content to explain what is going on. In time, the metaphor may cease to be a metaphor, and all of his theoretical commitments will be expressible in the clear, and he will draw on his theory to see how the metaphor is to be taken, not on the metaphor to see how the theory ought to go. But he has not yet conceived his theory as clearly as that, and working out responses to this sort of criticism is part of what needs to be done to come to a clearer conception of it.

Socrates, convinced, goes for the second option, that different things participate in the same Form in the way in which different people share in the same day. Parmenides rejoins that these people are each in a different place which is part of the whole place in which the day is. So the solution depends on the notion that

\textsuperscript{268}Parmenides asks if there is any third possibility, and Socrates replies that of course there isn’t. But Socrates is wrong, as it later develops. In the fourth deduction, 159b–160b, it is argued that if some Form of G is, then there are F’s such that things other than the G (those participating in G), are neither F nor the contrary of F. So, if we make G the Form of Participation, then we might take F to be the Whole, and perhaps it can be argued that participation cannot occur in the whole nor in the part. Perhaps we should say that participation occurs not in the whole Form, nor in a part of it, but in its exemplary content, which is neither the whole nor a part of it.

\textsuperscript{269}But might it be both separate from itself, and not so, but in different senses? Here the first deduction in the second half of the dialogue, 137c–142a, is relevant. At least it is suggested there that the One might be both the same as itself, and not the same as itself.

\textsuperscript{270}Again, might it be both one and many in different respects?
the Form has parts again, that it is not wholly, in every respect, one (simple, without parts).\textsuperscript{271} But surely the thing participating in it is related to the Form as a whole through its participation, not to some part of it. If the parts of the Form which each participant shares in are not parts of something that is One thing, in some sense beyond merely being a collection of those parts, it is hard to see why they should all have the same characteristic in virtue of their participation. Participation seems to presuppose, and yet destroy, the unity of the Form, not only by making it many, but also by making it the subject of contrary predicates. It makes the Form both one and many.\textsuperscript{272}

A number of other problems are raised at this point to drive the difficulty home. For one thing, consider the Form of the Large. Are the things that participate in it each of them to share only in some part of it? But surely the parts of the Large are small (in comparison to the Large), and similarly, the parts of the equal will be less than equal (i.e. less than equal to the equal, supposing that the equal is something equal to itself and not two things). And so things will be large and equal by participation in things that are not large, and not equal. It is notable here that Parmenides assumes that participation in the whole, on this picture, is actually participation in some part of the whole. He does not observe that it is arguable that the Forms have no parts, since they are eternal, as Plato does in the \textit{Phaedo}. Surely, if the Large is large, it \textit{must} have parts, if its largeness is the same sort of thing we find in sensibles, where the larger thing has some part of it the same in size as the smaller. If its largeness is \textit{not} the same sort of thing, then participation in the Form of the Large cannot explain why sensibles are large! Turning it around, the small is small by participation in the Small, but the Small has parts,\textsuperscript{273} each of which is small, of course, and each small thing participates in one of its parts. But then the Small as a whole turns out to be Large, compared to its parts, and it is by participation in the Small as a whole that things are small, even if this occurs through participation in its parts. So they are Small by participation in the Large, that is, in something that is large in its exemplary content. Moreover, what is small is made small by its association with a part of the Small, and so by \textit{adding} something to it, which seems absurd. The point of

\textsuperscript{271}Again, might it be both unitary, and divided into parts, in different respects?

\textsuperscript{272}Socrates might have persisted and presented a third metaphor, suggesting that the Form is like water, which is in several glasses. But this is even less compelling than people sharing in the same day is, for it is natural to say that the different people share in the same day, and rather artificial, though the point seems good once it is made, to suggest they each share in a part of the day. With water it is perfectly natural to say that there is water in each glass, but not the same water. In any case, Forms are not supposed to be extended in space, else they might be sensible, like the water in the glasses.

\textsuperscript{273}That we call it small indicates that we recognize such things can vary in size, from which we might plausibly argue that such things have parts by which their size is measurable.
all this seems to be to show that it is not only as Forms, in which things participate, that Forms turn out to be Many and One at the same time. There are Forms, then, that are One and Many at the same time, not only considered as single Forms with multiple participants, but even in their exemplary content. If the exemplary content of Forms is to represent all that goes on in the world of sensibles, the possibility of being many must somehow enter into it. Presumably there are two different ways in which Forms turn out to be subject to contraries, and one of them involves their exemplary content, not the characteristics of Forms considered as they are Forms, discussed in the general account of Forms as such.

Parmenides then begins again, and presents a version of what Aristotle calls the “third-man” argument. How is it that not only all the things that are one by participation in the One, but the One itself, which is also One, are one? They must be one in the same sense, it seems, if participation is to work (it is the One that is responsible for things being One, not something else, and that precisely because the One is one). So if the entire collection of ones, including the One itself, share a property, as the model of participation suggests they must, what accounts for this? Assuming we had any good reason to suppose that several different things are all one by participation in a single Form, we must now postulate a second, distinct, Form of the One above the first to account for the shared oneness here. But this second Form of One can then be asked about, why it is that it is One, just as the first Form of One and all the things participating in it are one… And so we end up driven to postulate a never ending series of Forms of the One. But the whole idea was to make it out that there is only one Form above the many participants, not to mention that the notion that there are many Forms of the One, in which each thing that is one participates, seems absurd, for aren’t things one then, by participation in many?

At this point Socrates abandons any hope of making his first thoughts on participation, depending on the metaphor of sharing, work out. Apparently the metaphor cannot be cashed in in any clear way to give rise to a defensible theory. The problem, it should be noted, is not that the theory somehow fails to explain or lacks real content, but rather that it seems to have too much content, so that it contradicts itself.

So Socrates suggests that perhaps the Forms are only thoughts in the mind. As I understand the

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274 And can be understood.

275 It has already appeared in Republic X as the “third bed argument,” and there Socrates drives to an imitation theory of participation, holding that the Form of Bed is a bed of itself, and not through imitation of anything else. But here the regress cannot be brought so readily to a stop, for surely the Form of the One is not in every way One, given that many things participate in it, as has already been argued.
historical Socrates, he actually supposed, not only that the Forms are in things, or shared by them, but also that the Forms, being ideals, are primarily conceived, so in minds, and in things due to their relationship to minds, that is, due to how they are conceived. So the criticisms of Parmenides at this point are directed at the Socratic theory of Forms, taking it that Forms are in things that share in them, and that Forms are ideal conceptions. Perhaps we could say (thinking once more of Anaxagoras) that the Forms are placed in things, or projected into them or on them, by the mind, which then finds in them what it has placed there. The objection raised here by Parmenides is very briefly stated, but the point seems to be this: If things are what they are by participation in thoughts, then it follows that all things are thoughts. Is this because only thoughts can resemble thoughts? Well, if Forms are thoughts as Socrates suggests, they are essentially thoughts. This is an account what Forms are, not a description of accidental characteristics they happen to have. So the Small is a thought, presumably the Thought of the Small, and whatever participates in it, and so is like it, is a thought of the small in some way. But that is absurd. If we suggest that participation in the Thought of the Small makes a thing Small, but does not make it a thought, then some account why its participation in the Form is limited to its Smallness, despite the fact that the Form’s Thoughtiness is just as much a part of what it is, is needed, and Socrates doesn’t have one. He could get one if he explained that the Small is what his thought is of, and so not itself a thought at all, but only an object of thought, but that means the Form is not a thought. If the Form is an object of thought, surely we do not imagine that thought generates its own objects, for then why aren’t things just whatever we think they are? The object of our thought is what it is independently of our thought. In any case, it seems that Forms have essential characteristics that are not part of their exemplary content, if we are to give any theory at all what they are.

A different point might also be intended. If the thought of Oneness or Piety is projected on a thing, and that is how it gets in it, then the thing in question is surely thought as One, or as Pious. This threatens the objectivity of the view that it is One and Pious, something that can perhaps be dealt with if all sensibles are One, or all actions Pious, in some way. Perhaps the objective fact becomes one concerning the way in which the thing may be thought one or pious, in that case, but now Socrates will be faced with the project of developing an explanation how the reality outside the mind makes it the case that it can be thought of as one in this way, but not that—which seems a hopeless project at first blush. It also threatens to make the oneness of a thing an aspect it has for its knower, and so it seems to say that being one is being thinkable in a certain way. All things are appearances.

That seems to Socrates to seal the fate of the notion that Forms are concepts or thoughts. He wants
something in the world to be thinkable, but he wants those things, not just thoughts about them, to be thinkable. In his third and last attempt, Socrates suggests that the Forms are patterns or likenesses found in the nature of things. This is Plato’s own notion drawn from the Middle Dialogues, derived from his Pythagorean investigations, and it treats participation as likeness. So Parmenides turns to consideration of the Form of the Like. He points out that if the things that are like are like the Form of the Like, well, then the Form of the Like is like them. That means that the collection of like things now includes the Form of the Like, and so a new Form of the Like must account for the likeness of the Form of the Like to its participants. The Form of the Like, on this theory, cannot be One, then, and once more, we face an impossibility. It seems that the Form of the Like must participate in itself to be like its participants. Surely at this point we could generalize, and declare that whatever account is given of participation in the Forms, it must presuppose that the Forms participate in some of the Forms.

In the second half of the dialogue Parmenides strongly hints at what we need to resolve the difficulties so far introduced. He considers whether the problem is the “One over many” assumption, that identifies a unique Form for any given character found in many things in which they all must participate. But to deny this, he thinks, is to “destroy the power of dialectic entirely.” So we must look elsewhere, retaining the assumption that for each character for which there is a Form there is only one Form. So he proposes instead that Forms can have characteristics by participation that are contrary to their content, and to others of their participatory characteristics, and proposes to investigate how this might be maintained without falling into contradiction. The One may in fact be many, both considered as a Form and considered in respect of its exemplary content, the Like unlike, and so forth. To see how this could be, he proposes a dialectical exercise. The outcome of the exercise is that one can find for a given form $G$, Forms $F_1$ through $F_8$, such that:

1. The Form of the $G$ (the One, in the example), cannot have a given property $F_1$ or its contrary (In relation to itself, i.e. its content, or insofar as it is the One). Hence, in respect of its content, the One is not a divided many, nor is it the contrary, a continuous undivided whole. Similarly, if the One is, it is not moving, nor at rest, for in relation to itself, in its exemplary content, it turns out that the very notions of movement and rest are inapplicable to the One.

2. If the $G$ is, then the $G$ is both $F_2$ and the contrary of $F_2$ (in relation to itself and in relation to the others, i.e. the other Forms). For instance, if the One is, the One is a being, but is not being

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276 Parmenides 135bc.
(not identical to Being Itself). The One is a unified, simple whole, but it is a collection and has parts, Being and the One (for Being is implicit in the exemplary content of the One). The One is both like and unlike itself, and like and unlike the others.

(3) If the G is, then the others are F
and the contrary of F
(in relation to themselves and in relation to the G). Here, if the One is, then the others (the other Forms) are not the One, but they are each of them One, and each of the others is like those other than itself, and unlike those other than itself, and so on.

(4) If the G is, then the others are not F
and not the contrary of F
(in relation to themselves and in relation to the G). So, if the One is, the others are not One, but the others are not (each of them) many.

(5) If the G is not, then the G is F
and the contrary of F
(in relation to itself and in relation to the others). Here, if the One is not (something, in some way), then the one is different from the others (from what it is not), and it is not different from them (for they are one).

(6) If the G is not, then the G is not F
and not the contrary of F
(in relation to itself and in relation to the others).

(7) If the G is not, then the others are F
and the contrary of F
(in relation to themselves and in relation to the G).

(8) If the G is not, then the others are not F
and not the contrary of F
(in relation to themselves and in relation to the G).

He works the exercise out himself for the Form of the One, providing a great many examples amounting to an exhaustive analysis of the relation of the One to the other Forms and to participants. I’ve given only a few examples here. I’ll look at them a little more closely in the next paragraph. Now these results are at least for the most part absurd and self-contradictory, if we do not distinguish the different ways in which a Form has its characteristics. I have, however, introduced relevant distinctions in parentheses in my list, in part to make it out how the arguments made can be regarded as plausible. A true Sophist, of course, would have left the results stand, and so argued that the notion of the One is absurd and impossible, but Socrates has enough experience dealing with the Sophists to work out what is wrong, and introduce the remarks in parentheses. Once he does that, he has noted that there are several ways in which Forms have a characteristic, and that will provide the key to resolving his earlier difficulties. But for now, let me look a little more closely at the example arguments given here from the exercise.
If the One is it is not moving and is not at rest. This appears to be a contradiction, but we may note
that as a matter of fact is not, for it is not moving in relation to itself, that is, considered as it is the One, in its
content, it is unchanging; but it is not at rest in relation to the others, that is, in relation to the other Forms, for
none of the Forms are in space at all. It is not the same as itself in relation to itself, for it is a different Form from
the Form of the Same, that is, its content does not include being the same, but in relation to the others it is not
different from itself, that is, it does not share in difference from itself. So it seems we can speak of a Form in
relation to itself, so that the Form of the Same is Same, and not Other, in relation to itself. Here we assign its
properties by looking to what it is the Form of, considering what it represents. It represents the same, not the
other. This is what I have called the “exemplary content” of the Form. We can also speak of it in relation to
others, and then we are considering what properties the Form has as a Form among Forms, without attending
to its content, or what it is the Form of. Of course, in this way the Form is different from the other Forms.
Similarly, we can consider the others as they relate to the G, that is, the content of that Form (the way in which
they are One), or as they are in themselves, that is, considered as Forms in general. In the latter way they are
many, of course. The whole exercise rapidly becomes tedious, though it was interpreted in some (incorrect)
ways by later thinkers that makes it markedly more interesting. But then Logic often is as tedious as it is
unavoidable, and Parmenides’s remarks do answer the difficulties we have examined so far, once we consider
all these things together. By seeing how one can argue for any position here if one interprets “is” in the right
way, and selects the right G and F, one sees how contradictions are to be avoided in the theory of forms. It
turns out we can make a set of distinctions in how we consider the Forms that will allow us to say contrary
things of them after all, in different respects, just as if they were mere sensibles participating in the Forms. In
particular, each Form shares in the One, just as particulars do.\textsuperscript{277} The Forms turn out to be particulars, ones,
that share in Forms just as much as sensibles do. Indeed, it seems that everything that can be spoken of is a
particular thing, a one, as Parmenides held, not just sensibles, but Forms (or kinds of things) as well.

Now consider the bearing of this on the problems so far proposed concerning participation. (1) Is the
whole of the Form to be found in each participant, or part of the Form? Letting “in” represent the presence of

\textsuperscript{277}There is no suggestion here that Forms share in the One differently from the way in which particulars do. The Forms
simply are particulars. Sometimes it has been suggested that a Form is like a Standard of Measurement, such as the Meter Bar in Paris.
This bar has lots of properties, including being a Meter long, and it has its property of being meter long in two ways—its length
(under given conditions) is a meter long, by definition of meter (that it is a meter long under these conditions is its content), and it
is, as it happens, a meter long (or not, say at the temperature at which it is currently being maintained). The meter bar is a meter long
because it is the same length as the meter bar (under the defined conditions). And, of course, the meter bar is one more physical
object, not something standing outside the physical world.
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a Form by participation, we might answer that the Whole is in each, and it isn’t. It is as far as the content of
the Form is concerned, that is, a square shares in the whole content of the Square, and a pious action shares in
the whole of the Pious (though it perhaps only shares in it in part—but its sharing is not a sharing of some part
of piety alone, but a partial sharing of the whole). But it is not “in it” insofar as the Form considered as a Form
among Forms is concerned, for the Form is not in the thing in any sense of “in” we can specify that would
permit one particular to be in another. The whole Form is not, nor is any part of the Form. (2) The “third
man”: If all the things that are one by participation in the One be joined with the One in a single group, and
then we demand that some new Form of the One be found above this group, we could respond that the One
is one, inasmuch as, in relation to the others or as a Form among others, it shares in itself. There is no problem
with the One participating in itself as long as we recognize there are two ways in which the One is one, as it
participates in itself, and as it exemplifies or is a paradigm of the One. (3) The Form of the Small, it was
suggested, might be a thought in a person’s mind. But then everything small would be a thought, which is
absurd. But, of course, it might be a thought insofar as it is one Form among others, through participation in
the Form of Thought. Just as every Form is one by sharing in the One, so all are Thoughts by sharing in
Thought. But what participates in the Form of the Small is not thereby one, or a thought, but only small, for
the Small exhausts the content of what the Form is of, or represents. It is a thought without thought being part
of its exemplary content. (4) If we take participation to be a matter of likeness, then it is pointed out that if A
is like B, B is like A, and so the Form of the Like is like its participants, since they are like it. But, of course,
no new Form of Likeness needs to be evolved to account for the fact that the first such Form is like other
things, for it simply participates in itself in respect of the other, and is like them for that reason. Just as the
Form of the One is One in itself, and also one by participation in itself, so the Form of the Like is Like in itself,
but also like its participants as a Form among others, by participation in itself.

It seems, then, that none of the arguments against any of Socrates’s suggestions is any good, after all!
But this can only be established if Socrates confesses that there are these two different ways in which a Form
can be assigned a property, and that a Form can participate in Forms, including itself. At this point it might be
objected that a Form cannot participate in itself, but why not? Surely it would be because it would have to be
other than itself to participate in itself. But it can be other than itself, while also, of course, it is not. It is not
other than itself as it is in itself, in its content. But it can participate in the Other, inasmuch as it is one Form
among others, for instance. In what way does it have to be other than itself to participate in itself? Well, it
would have to play one role, participating singular, so one Form among others, while it plays another role at
the same time, Form of the One, say, inasmuch as others share in it as it is the One. (A third possibility: it could play this second role as a Form, rather than Form of the One, and in this way it would be shared in, say, and One over many.) There is no contradiction here. So it seems clear that a Form can share in itself.

At this point we might ask which of the options Socrates suggests as a model for participation is the right one. Plato does not tell us here, but he rules none of them out. In fact, we shall see in the *Timaeus* that they are all of them right. Indeed, Socrates even turns out to be right in his hesitation that all characteristics of things have forms. If muddiness is to be viewed as a sort of disorder, then it might be that there is no Form for it at all, just as Socrates says, even though it really does occur. But that is all I want to say for now. We shall turn to the positive development of the theory of Forms in the *Timaeus* only after considering the other “critical” dialogues, if we may call them so, the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*.

But we are not done with the critical content of the *Parmenides*, for although the distinctions introduced can be used to resolve the difficulties so far rehearsed, Parmenides proposes one further difficulty in the dialogue, the “greatest difficulty,” as he says, and suggests this difficulty will be untouched by his dialectic here, and require some further insight he does not pursue at present. Consider the Form of Master. Having made the distinction between participation in the Form and the way a Form possesses its exemplary content, we might note that the exemplary content of the Form of Master includes, in a way, the Form of Slave (not a particular participant in the Form), since it is a necessary truth that a Master has a Slave, and can give the slave commands, let us say. (So the content also contains in a way the form of Command.) But, of course, the participant that is a master is not master of Slave Itself, but of a participant slave, and does not give him the Command itself, but only participant commands. There seem to be two levels here, two worlds, as it were, which do not intersect, although the one world has structures similar to those of the other. The Forms work rather like a map of the campus, which does not (in one sense) have real buildings on it, but only representations of them. This might well be an attractive view once we begin to worry about how it is that the Form of Master is a Master. Surely it does not have a slave, or give orders. But we can say it is the Master of Slave Itself, and gives Order Itself, and if these things are as mysterious as Master Itself, at least these mysterious things resemble their counterparts in the sensible world by being related to one another in corresponding ways. It is the way in which a general of an army, say, resembles a corporation head. They hold similar places in similar structures. So the Form of Large does not need parts, but only needs to be related to the Form of Part in the way large things are related to parts.

With that in mind, though, how are we to understand how Forms are knowable? We inquire after the
Form of Knowledge, pointing out that the Knower Itself will have Knowing Itself, and so the Known Itself, as elements in its exemplary content. Now this content in the knowing which is understood, Knowing Itself, relates the Knower Itself and the Known Itself, but not the person participating in knowing. The participants in the Form are not part of its content. Moreover, the person participating in knowing thereby knows the Form, and if he knows things participating in the Form this is only in virtue of knowing the Form. So to participate in Knower means to be related to a Form’s exemplary content, not to be related to something falling under it! So in the case of the knowing relation this parallelism attempts to capture a crossing of the lines between Forms and participants, between worlds, not simply relations restricted to the world of participants. Can that be legitimate?

I think the short answer is that it can, as long as a Form can participate in itself. The Form of the Known is known by Socrates when Socrates participates in it as regards itself, so that the Form of the Known itself participates in the Form of the Known. Forms, like their sensible participants, can participate in Forms, then, not only in their Formal Theoretic relations, as it were, but even in their relations to other individuals who only participate in Forms, and have no Formal Content of their own. It may be hard for us to form an image of such a thing, but there is no contradiction involved in it.

We have already seen a similar case in the Republic, similarly identified as too much to handle at the time it is introduced, concerning the Form of the Good, which was declared somehow to be unknowable, since it is presupposed in all accounts, and so no account can be given of the Good Itself. And we shall see the problem again in the Theaetetus, and again left without an explicit solution, where the simple elements introduced in a theory seem to lack accounts, and so to be unknowable. Now it seems that we cannot give an account of the Form of Knowledge itself, and one might be forgiven for thinking that all this is somehow connected. But we are now trespassing on territory Plato staked out in the Theaetetus, to which we will turn next.

13. PROBLEMS WITH KNOWLEDGE: THE THEAETETUS

Well, Socrates... It seems to me that a man who knows something perceives what he knows, and the way it appears at present, at any rate, is that knowledge is simply perception.

Plato, Theaetetus 151e.
In the *Theaetetus*, Plato provided an elaboration and defense of the definition of knowledge proposed in the *Meno*, that it is true belief together with a correct explanatory account why the thing is as it is. The result was the most influential work in epistemology in the Western tradition, a work that ultimately set the terms of the discussion not only in Ancient thought, but in the reflections of the founding thinkers in the Early Modern tradition and the early 20th century.278

What is knowledge, then? Theaetetus begins by listing examples of knowledge. It is not the theoretical definition wanted,279 but it helps a little, since the definition should square with those examples, though Socrates remarks that we won’t know these examples are knowledge until we have the definition of knowledge in hand, a point that returns to bedevil him at the end of the dialogue. So the definition of knowledge must explain areas of expertise such as geometry as well as practical crafts such as shoe-making,280 unless these examples turn out later to bear only a deceptive resemblance to knowledge. Indeed, given the account developed by the end of the dialogue, a craft will not count as real knowledge, though perhaps its theoretical side, explaining why the procedures used in it are the best, will. Given that Theaetetus, and Theodorus, both mathematicians, are the principals in the dialogue, one expects that the knowledge that is to be defined here is scientific knowledge, the sort of thing already discussed in the *Republic* and the *Meno*.

The competitor to Plato’s own view is introduced with Theaetetus’s first serious attempt at definition, to the effect that knowledge is perception, a direct awareness not involving any sort of image or representation of, or any inference to, the thing of which one is aware. This direct perception is identified by Socrates with an appearance of something to someone that somehow contains an immediate guarantee of its truth. The prime example of this is taken to be sense perception.

Socrates suggests it is necessary to develop Theaetetus’s proposal, bringing out its full meaning and its chief consequences, before subjecting it to examination to see if it is likely to be true.281 There follows, in explanation, the famous passage in which Socrates compares himself to a midwife. Socrates, it seems, is barren, and cannot himself come up with any definition or explanatory hypothesis. Rather, like a midwife, he assists

278Burnyeat (1990) is an excellent treatment of the dialogue. I have also used Fine (1979a), (1979b), (1998), (1994), (1996), and Cooper (1970). Hare (1982), parts 5 and 6, is an excellent discussion of the issues discussed here, focusing especially on the role of various features of the Greek language in shaping Plato’s thought.

279*Theaetetus* 146d-147c.

280*Theaetetus* 146ce.

281*Theaetetus* 148e-151d.
another in giving birth to a new hypothesis, a painful process that takes quite a while. After the birth is completed he is qualified to help examine the child and see if it is a genuine scientific hypothesis, or a “wind egg” or “phantom,” which cannot be developed and brought to maturity in its explanatory function. If it is not viable, he will take it away from its mother as a midwife would take away a monstrous or stillborn infant, and abandon it on the mountainside. Socrates the midwife represents the dialectical process by which hypotheses are elaborated and tested. It is no part of the dialectical process to propose a hypothesis, or provide a perception of the truth—it can only examine them, to see how they need to be developed if they are to do their necessary explanatory work, and whether, in the end, they can do that work at all.

Now, if knowledge is perception, we might wonder whether dialectic has anything to do with it. Dialectic cannot provide the hypothesis that may prove to be knowledge, so perception, which provides the belief that is known through it, is no part of dialectic. Nor, given that perception is a direct view of the thing, and involves no reasoning, can dialectic be part of perception. Still, Socrates suggests, it is necessary to test if an apparent perception is a real one, or only delusive appearance, by examining its self-consistency, its coherence with other confirmed beliefs, and its power to explain why it is that what seems to be perceived has those properties by which it can be identified. This means that he thinks perception does not provide an assurance of its own accuracy within itself. Should Theaetetus have objected straight off to the use of dialectic at all, and simply claimed that he perceived his definition to be true, and nothing more could be said? Well, he could not very well do so, because his definition clearly, like all definitions, has explanatory work to do, and dialectic must be used to determine if it can do this explanatory work. We cannot tell, it seems, if it can or not without trying to do it, and the definition does not constitute knowledge what knowledge is unless it can do it. So we see, now, why this explanation of the functions of dialectic precedes the discussion. If taken seriously, it bears on the adequacy of Theaetetus’s definition. Assuming it is right, there must be at least some cases of knowledge, including the knowledge of knowledge they are in fact seeking right now, which are not perception.

Moreover, it is suggested that if there is knowledge that is perception, it lacks something that only dialectic can provide, namely assurance that it is in fact correct. We might even say that to be correct, it must be able to pass some sort of test, and we cannot know if something passes a test without testing it. Perception can only be established as accurate if it is tested. But perception, of course, does not test itself, but rather

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282 And therefore, apparently, true.
I.V. Plato and his Contemporaries presents itself as correct without further examination. Indeed, it is hard to see where perception differs from mere confident belief, though surely the confident belief produced by perception cannot be the perception itself, and so it must differ. If we ask how the perception produces confident belief, in hope of discovering why we should be confident, we are searching for explanations, whose adequacy can only be tested by dialectic. Are only some confident beliefs perceptions, though we cannot know which? Or are all confident beliefs perceptions, so that dialectical testing is unnecessary? This, as it turns out, is one question raised in Socrates’s development of Theaetetus’s hypothesis, and since no one takes him to task for his baseless presupposition that dialectic is needed to test confident beliefs, we had best turn back to the dialogue. Our digression has gone far enough.

To develop the perception thesis Socrates proposes two other theses, which, he holds, elucidate the Theaetetan proposal, and stand or fall with it. The first of these is the Protagorean claim that all things are for each person as they appear to that person—“man is the measure of all things.” The other is the Heraclitean thesis, to the effect that everything known is continually changing. It is not immediately obvious, to say the least, why either of these should be regarded as equivalent to the Theaetetan thesis and so a good deal of time is spent developing that point before criticism of the developing theory is undertaken.  

To begin with, the Theaetetan hypothesis is ambiguous. Knowledge might be supposed to be the sort of appearing that occurs when something that is there does the appearing. We perceive something, or it appears or manifests itself to us, only when the thing or fact perceived really is there, or really is the case. We don’t say that one perceives a person’s anger, or his anger is apparent to her, unless that person is in fact angry. “Perception” designates a successful grasp of what is really present, which does sometimes occur when something appears (makes itself known) to a person. The thing really is as it is perceived, and somehow the way the thing

283 There is an alternative reading for the dialogue, sometimes called the “two worlds” view, and presented, for instance, in F.M. Cornford (1934), which holds that Plato intends to show that sensory perception in fact satisfies the Protagorean and Heraclitean visions, which are true of sensibles, but that this means it cannot be knowledge, and so there is no knowledge of sensibles, but only of Forms, which have a superior level of reality such that the Protagorean and Heraclitean theses are not true of them. The reading I adopt takes it that Plato holds that knowledge of sensibles is perfectly possible, and might even arise through perception, but that it is not to be identified with perception, but has another nature, rooted in the mental power to give and understand an explanatory account. Moreover, it denies that Plato accepted either the Protagorean or the Heraclitean view regarding sensibles in general, for sensibles participate in Forms, and are shaped by souls, and are therefore knowable, though only through their connection to the Forms. All this will be sharpened up with a consideration of the “becoming” of sensibles when we look at the Timaeus. The “two worlds” view had significant influence as a reading of Plato in later Platonism, and we shall have to talk about it a good deal before we are done in connection with other thinkers.

284 Perhaps we might, but then we are exploiting the normal sense of the words to speak ironically. What might I mean by saying “I perceived she was angry, though it turned out she wasn’t”?  

is in fact registers with us due to our perceptual capacities, and so we come, reliably, to believe of the perceived that it is present or true. This means, it would seem, that it produces a representation of itself in us, at least in the form of a belief, which, given the workings of our senses and the existing situation, can be expected, given the manner of its production, to be true. So this would mean the Theaetetan thesis is that knowledge is an infallible, direct perception of something real (or really true, that is, true without qualification). Knowledge, on this account, is not the outcome of dialectical investigation, discussion, the attempt to develop explanatory theories, and the like, unless, of course, somehow the essential purpose of such procedures is to stimulate a direct perception of the truth which can stand entirely on its own, needing no dialectical procedure to establish its accuracy thereafter. That does not mean that knowledge of the Forms could not occur on this account, but it would commit one to a perception of the Forms, and so the account of the perception of the Forms outside the world between lives in this world, which we found in the Phaedrus and have supposed to be metaphorical, would have to be taken literally. Something analogous to sight, or perhaps better than sight, if visual perception requires dialectic to establish its accuracy, would have to grasp or produce awareness of the Forms, if the Forms are to be known.

Plato’s own view, we might expect from the midwife discussion, would be that every pretended perception, including one of the Forms, needs dialectic, and so an associated explanatory account, to explain why things are as they seem to be, and so provide a way of distinguishing true from false appearances. He might still allow that there are ways of attaining hypotheses that provide truth under favorable conditions. So visual perception, or the perception of the Forms in the afterlife, may be such ways of arriving at true beliefs. Let us call this, not knowledge, but “perceptual cognition.” In that case, Plato need not deny that we often have perceptual cognition, but, he can claim that without dialectic we will never be rationally assured that an appearance to us is in fact perceptual cognition.

To return to our distinction of the senses of “appearance,” sometimes we refer to mere appearance, that is, to something that appears true to a person even if it is not really so. So, perhaps she only appears to be rich, but is not. Here what seems to be meant is that the person, whether she is rich or not, might well be mistaken for a rich person, that there is something about her that makes that mistake likely. In a related way, Philosophers sometimes speak of an appearance and mean only the occurrence of some putative representation or image in the mind which might turn out to be an image or representation of an object or state of affairs that is nowhere to be found. It could remain even if its supposed object were non-existent. This might seem a bit odd (it certainly did to Greek thinkers), since surely nothing can go around appearing to people if it is non-
existent, but that means we have the first sense of appearance confusedly in mind, an actual thing’s making itself known to the mind. This second sense is related, but distinct, and in this second sense, an appearance might well be false. Indeed, generally to say that something appears to be true in this sense is to raise the question whether in fact it is. There is evidence of some sort, or we would not say it appears to be so, but if the evidence is really known to be conclusive, it would be a violation of the rules of conversational implication to say that it appears to be so, rather than saying that it is so, or that one perceives it to be so.

The Protagorean thesis, that “everything is for a person as it appears to that person,” seems to rest on a confusion between these two sense of “appear.” If something appears, the thing is there. What appears to a person is so. Now (1) whatever seems to be the case to us appears to us to be so, and so (2) it appears to us, and so (3) it is so. (The fallacy in the argument should be evident.) Thus whatever seems to a person to be the case is true. So we might read the Theaetetan hypothesis that knowledge is perception, that is, the appearing of things to a person, in a Protagorean way, and then we would take knowledge to be simply belief.

Now contradictory things sometimes seem to be true to different people. How can we reconcile that with the Protagorean thesis? Contradictory things can’t both be true at the same time in the same respect, so we will have to introduce some respect in which these conflicting appearances differ from one another. That is easy enough, for they are appearances to different people, or to the same person at different times or in different circumstances. So whatever appears to be so to a person is true, but true for him, then, under those circumstances, and there is no such thing as being true, period—and then we have the full Protagorean thesis, as developed when we discussed Protagoras in Chapter 3. What exactly is the connection between this Protagorean “knowledge” and Theaetetus’s view that knowledge is perception? Well, Theaetetus’s perception, if we take it to be a simple reliable grasp producing true belief, gets its guarantee from the simple fact that we have it, a fact of which we are immediately aware. The Protagorean hypothesis would make out this guarantee as one to be found in every appearing, whenever it seems to someone that something is the case, and so, unlike Plato, it seems, he would have no problem with the occurrence of Theaetetan direct perception in plausible cases such as the operation of the senses. One might claim that if our sense perception, say, is to count as

285 Of course, we might take the Theaetetan assumption in a different way, to claim a kind of empiricist view, to the effect that all knowledge is, or somehow depends on, sensory perception, or a direct perception of the truth, whether through the senses or some other means (such as witnessing the Forms). What happens in knowledge (but not necessarily in other beliefs) is that the thing simply appears to us. Perhaps sometimes something seems to us true when nothing is in fact appearing to us, and we might mistake this for direct perception, but then we are mistaken. This is not knowledge, only the actual appearing of something is. This would distinguish between knowledge and mere opinion, and would, of course, be contrary to the Protagorean thesis, so it is not how Plato takes Theaetetus’s view.
knowledge, we must have an understanding how it works, so that we can reasonably suppose it to be accurate, that we are interpreting the images correctly, that they are not produced in some unusual way for which the visual apparatus was not designed, and so on. It is very hard to see how we can do this without being accomplished physiological/perceptual psychologists. But I know what I see clearly just by noting that I do, I know it immediately, without theories or thought. Even small children know things through vision. Protagoras provides us with that. Of course, the price may be too high, if Theaetetus wants to hold on to the notion that we are sometimes mistaken, just not when direct perception occurs, for the price of the Protagorean guarantee is that we regard no seeming or belief anyone may enjoy as false. But if we try to say why our simple conviction is good enough in sense perception, but not elsewhere, it is hard to put our finger on a reason (unless we begin to talk about the results of a dialectical examination of the supposed perception). Perhaps it is better to accept and try to understand the Protagorean paradox.

But if Protagoras is right, then what do we do if it seems two people have contrary perceptions of the same thing? Well, we retreat to the notion that the dagger appears in one way to this person, in another to that one, even though the dagger is itself the same. What differs is not the dagger, which would have to differ from itself in that case, but the appearances of the dagger, perhaps our visual images of it. It turns out, then, that the dagger is not an object of direct perception, if it is common to the two observers. If we insist that things appear about the dagger to each of these persons, these appearances must be mere seemings, not perceptions. Thus we identify the real objects of our immediate perceptual knowledge as something internal to ourselves, and private, directly observable only by ourselves. In that way all danger that two people should have contrary perceptions of the same thing is removed. We have no perceptual knowledge of real external objects, and our direct perceptual knowledge of our images or appearances fall under the Protagorean dictum. Indeed, perhaps there is no truth at all to what it is for an image to appear to myself except this, that for me, there is an image there (and you can’t check up on that). There can be no real conflict between my appearances and yours, because mine are mine, and yours are yours. You cannot even judge of my sensory experiences of the dagger, the stuff of which I am reasonably quite certain, because they are private to me, and you cannot experience them immediately, but can only experience them through images or representations of them, your own images of them. We can’t share direct experiences. If a person thinks he has a certain experience, then he does. And all our basic knowledge is perception of our experiences. Indeed, it is rather hard for the Empiricist to find good arguments for our beliefs about the external world that he supposes follow on this basic knowledge, so that Empiricism shows a notorious tendency to collapse into skepticism concerning the external world. Gorgias and
the Atomists, as we have seen, were well aware of the strategy, and the problem. So if Theaetetan Empiricism is pressed, it seems to retreat naturally to a position very close to Theaetetan Protagoreanism.

So far, then, we find that Socrates argues that all perceiving is knowing, as Theaetetus supposes, given the Protagorean thesis, since every perceptual appearance is then unerring, and an appearance how things really are for the perceiver.²⁸⁶ He has not yet shown that the Theaetetan hypothesis leads to Protagorean views, but we have found some reasons why a Theaetetan might take refuge in Protagorean doctrines as providing the best chance to justify his view. What about the Heraclitean claim? How can one make it out that it is somehow equivalent to the notion that knowledge is direct perception that all knowable things are always changing? Plato presses the Empiricist here in another way, arguing that we can only have knowledge of something that persists if we have knowledge of the future and the past. But such knowledge depends on memory, and accurate prediction, not direct awareness of past or future events. Memory is something like sense perception, providing us with images of which we are directly aware, perhaps, but that we must interpret as signs how the past was, for we only remember now through memory images we are aware of now—the memory images we rely on are not in the past we remember using them. Similar remarks can be made concerning the future, which is not subject to immediate awareness in the present, but, of course, our claims to know the future are considerably weaker than our claims to know the past, since we can rely on no representations produced in us by future events to know it. So what we are in fact aware of directly is a series of momentary mental states, never any persisting entity. Moreover, we are not directly aware of ourselves either, but only of momentary representations (whether of ourselves or of something else) belonging to us. So, nothing we know persists, and all such things are always changing. That means that there is no chance of any persisting thing being known or observed to have contrary properties. Direct observation and direct knowledge is always of something that one never saw before and will never see again. Moreover, the observer can only observe his present perceptions, not his present self, and certainly not his past or future self. Even if we insist that a perception involves awareness not of the object perceived, but also the perceiving, so that it involves perception of the perceiver, still, every observation involves a non-repeating, unique observer observing a non-repeating unique thing. So, like the Protagorean hypothesis, the Heraclitean would remove all possibility of two seemings or appearings of a thing being contradictory to one another. Moreover, it seems that we can deduce Heracliteanism from Theaetean Empiricism.

²⁸⁶Theaetetus 152bc.
Plato also suggests that Protagoras secretly intended to teach the Heracleitean view, for it follows from the Protagorean view.\textsuperscript{287} The reason is that talk about something being what it is \textit{for} a given person, characteristic of the Protagorean view, is something of a riddle, and seems to demand further explication. Socrates suggests that what happens here is that the thing \textit{becomes} what it is \textit{for} a person, that is, the interaction between the person and the thing perceived makes it what it is. White arises between the eye and the object, when one perceives something to be white.\textsuperscript{288} That is, it seems, its being white just is, in this case, its being white \textit{for that person}. If you want to insist it is white in general, then you’d have to insist it is white \textit{for anyone who looks at it} (something that is never so). Thus one can know it is white without having the least idea what it is to be white (in purely physical terms), for to assert it is white is not to assert it has some real physical property remaining, perhaps, to be discovered, but only to assert that it appears white. Now what this leads to in the end is a causal theory about the arising of appearances, but one which makes no reference to any persisting thing, neither the eye nor the thing that is white, nor even the whiteness itself. Each of these three things is identified as a “motion,” perhaps we should say a process. The process is that of an eye seeing a white stone, say. There is a slow active aspect to the process, the stone, and a slow passive aspect, the eye. So we say the stone acts on the eye. And then there is a quicker action, that of its whiteness on this particular seeing, modifying it to the seeing of white, rather than red or black. Or perhaps we can take the motions here not as processes, but simply as what stands as becoming between one thing and another. Everything that is is what it is in virtue of its relations to what produces it and what receives that production. That includes what produces any given thing—it too is what it is only as something that becomes, is produced in something by something. And so on, \textit{ad infinitum}. We can fill in this picture a little further if we take the Protagorean view, for everything is what it is because that is what it comes to seem to be to someone, and that seeming, the person to whom it occurs, and the object that seems, are all what they are because of how they seem to someone.

Once this much is granted, we can argue that there can be no false perception,\textsuperscript{289} since whenever there are two perceptions, there are different perceivers, and different objects, as well. Nothing persists, ever, says Heraclitus, and so nothing persists long enough to allow it to perceive or be perceived a second time. So no

\textsuperscript{287} \textit{Theaetetus} 152cc.

\textsuperscript{288} \textit{Theaetetus} 154a.

\textsuperscript{289} \textit{Theaetetus} 158e–160c.
two perceptions can ever contradict one another. So, not only does Protagoras imply Heraclitus, but Heraclitus implies Protagoras. We have seen that Protagoras implies Theaetetus, and that Theaetetus implies Heraclitus. So we have enough to declare the three views equivalent to one another. They stand or fall together.

The reader is no doubt rather dizzy at this point. Is this even coherent? It seems to have done away with truth altogether rather than guaranteeing truth in perception, and it is not clear at all that any scientific account of perception can be given, one involving causal processes, without making references to the persisting perceiver, unchanging in any number of ways, and always numerically the same, at least, and a similarly persisting perceived thing. If one wants to insist that reality consists of momentary states of affairs, and the real causal laws simply specify what momentary states of affairs occur after others, then surely we are wrong if we suppose the stone persists in being, is first black, and later white. What appears so to us is not so. But we need not despair, for Plato quite agrees that the view, now that it is fully elaborated, cannot be defended. He means, on his own behalf, to advance something considerably more coherent.

He launches four attacks on it. The first two each allow of an answer, but that answer requires the development of the Protagorean and Heraclitean sides of perception. The third and fourth attacks, directed against the thesis in its Protagorean and Heraclitean forms, are presented as decisive refutations of Theaetetus’s thesis. He is arguing that we can avoid the first pair of objections only by making moves that leave us open to the third, and can avoid that only by opening ourselves up to the fourth.

First, then, it is objected that, given the Protagorean aspect of the view, if knowledge is perception this will not allow us to distinguish the wise from the unwise, which knowledge was introduced to do in the beginning of the dialogue, for no one will ever be mistaken. The objection had been advanced by Plato against Protagoras in the Cratylus, and left to stand as though conclusive there, but here a reply is developed on Protagoras’s behalf. The wise will have appearances that are good and useful, whereas the unwise will have appearances that are not useful. The wise man convinces a city to replace damaging opinions about the just with advantageous ones, making the new, advantageous opinions both seem to be right, and to be right, so that wholesome things now seem, and are, just. The wise man has and produces better opinions, not truer ones.

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290 Theaetetus 160e–184a.

291 Cratylus 386c; Theaetetus 162d–168b. The passage has been seized on by F.C.S. Schiller as an affirmation of a pragmatic point of view. The wise man is better adjusted to the world in virtue of his opinions, so that he finds the world unpleasant less often. (Of course, however he finds the world to be, that is how it is, but he lives, as it were, in a different world than the fool, due to his beliefs. William James in his “pluralism” seems to advance a similar view.)
Now if it is objected here that there must be objective facts, then, about what is useful and good and what is not, we can deny this, and hold that what is good for the person (as it appears to him) not what is good without qualification, is at stake. Plato does not develop the strategy here, but it looks as though Socrates might think one could take the pleasant as the good, and identify it at the same time as what seems to be good, and then build up a kind of Protagorean/Socratic hedonism, since the unwise will eventually come to see their actions as unwise as their unpleasant consequences unfold. Then these actions will turn out to have been unwise, to be unwise from the perspective of their consequences, even though they appeared to be, and were, wise and pleasant at the time they were performed. The wise are those whose opinions that their actions are good stick with them, whose actions remain good into the future, and the unwise those whose opinions and actions do not.

Laying out, then, the theory as Protagoras intended it, without relying on popular and metaphorical formulations of it, is essential to assessing the theory appropriately. Indeed, in the course of the discussion Socrates brings an objection on Protagoras’s behalf against captious objections based on verbal difficulties, pointing out that the theory leads us to speak in odd ways, as though common idiomatic expression were a guide to truth. One example of this is pointing out that we call those wise who know the truth, so that Protagoras has robbed us of that which distinguishes the wise from the foolish. This theory of what wisdom is is simply rejected by Protagoras, and he thinks that all our talk about truth and falsehood is systematically misleading as to what is really going on, which is that some views are advantageous and others are not. Similarly, it would be silly to object that if perception is knowing, then, since we sometimes are said to see at a distance or near at hand, dimly or clearly, we must know at a distance or near at hand, dimly or clearly. It would be rather like objecting to the modern physical-chemical conception of matter that it implies that a solid table is actually mostly empty space, the space within and between the atoms making it up, and that, of course, is absurd. If we are to talk about empty space in the way physicists do, most of the table is empty space. If we talk about empty space in the way ordinary folks do (which physicists don’t need to do), then clearly it is not.

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292 This passage convinces some scholars that Socrates was never intended to defend hedonism in the *Protagoras*, but that the hedonism he draws from Protagoras in his questioning is only what Protagoras is committed to if he is consistent with his own theory. I took the line that Socrates himself is a hedonist in Chapter 4, following Irwin, but it must be admitted that if we assume the views presented here in the *Theaetetus* were already clearly envisioned when the *Protagoras* was written, this alternative view is certainly an attractive one.

293 *Theaetetus* 165d
But there is a danger in this defense. Protagoras wants to make it hang on his carefully expressed theoretical views, not the vagaries of ordinary language, much as Aristotle insists that a theory can only be properly expressed if one avoids every sort of metaphor, so that we can see clearly what does and does not follow from it, and so apply logic or dialectic to its examination. In particular, he hopes to be allowed to express things that seem absurd from the point of view of ordinary speech, but are in fact defensible as long as we speak precisely enough, saying only exactly what we mean. But by taking this line, Protagoras is opening himself up to a theoretically based objection to those views, which cannot be wriggled out of by claiming he didn’t mean it literally, if he sticks to the account of wisdom (which belongs to those with the best theoretical views) in his defense against the first objection.

One of the misconceived, merely verbal objections dismissed in Protagoras’s reply turns out to have something in it, after all. It was objected that if we remember something, we do not do so by perceiving what we remember. So we do not know that which we remember (but, presumably, we know or perceive memory impressions or some such thing). Let us simply allow that this is so, even if it does not fit our ordinary, loose, theoretically uninformed or misinformed, ways of speaking. Then, if we are to have a useful appearance, it must guide our behavior so as to improve our future situation. So it must allow us to say what will appear to someone in advance. If it is a damaging belief, it will lead us to say that in advance something will appear to someone… that will not appear to him! So there must be a truth to be known about what will appear to people, a truth knowable in advance of the appearances it concerns, and a truth which is independent of what appears to people about the matter. (It is not independent of how the matter appears when the future time finally comes, of course, but it depends on that appearance, not the appearance to people concerning it before it comes.) It seems that the wise man or the fool must be the same man as the one to whom these things will later appear or fail to appear, or else there is no reason to say that they are wise or fools, for their appearances do them no good or evil. So concerning the future, it turns out there is a truth, and what is false can appear to be true, and we cannot escape this difficulty by assigning one appearance to the earlier fellow, and the other to the different, later fellow, for if these pragmatic procedures as non-figurative, then he is once again faced with dialectic, and dialectic is relevant, after all, to knowledge. Knowledge is not merely confident belief.

The reader should look at the remarks above concerning Socrates’s claims to be a midwife again. No one took him up on his baseless assumption that dialectic was necessary there, but now he turns to the matter himself. Protagoras would hope to avoid the point by claiming the procedures of dialectic are merely figurative ways of describing something else, the pragmatic procedures by which we decide which of the true views is best, but Socrates won’t let him get away with this. If he is to take the pragmatic procedures as non-figurative, then he is once again faced with dialectic, and dialectic is relevant, after all, to knowledge. Knowledge is not merely confident belief.

Theaetetus 163d–164b.
considerations are to make sense, they must be the same fellow. So now it seems that the same person may perceive the same thing (the, at first, future and later, present, perception) and have different opinions about it. But in that case, one opinion is wrong, and so not all appearances are correct. It is noteworthy that in presentation of his view in non-metaphorical, theoretically accurate terms, Protagoras cannot avoid referring to a city that regards something as just, and a pupil educated by a Sophist, changing its view, as though it persisted through the change, taking one view and then another.296

And so the “table-turning” argument is justified—Protagoras’s principle must be wrong, for if it is right for those many people who believe it wrong, it is wrong for them.297

Socrates lays out the argument in the dialogue, and it is granted by his interlocutors, even though there seems to be an adequate defense. It would seem that perhaps that (1) the principle is false for those who believe it so, for them, but (2) it is not false for those who believe it so, for Protagoras. There is no contradiction between (1) and (2), given the qualifiers, “for them” and “for Protagoras.” Won’t that preserve the principle? Let us expand the argument just a bit, using what we have learned from Plato himself in this dialogue. Assume someone changes her mind, first disbelieving the Protagorean principle, and then, after Protagoras makes his arguments, coming to accept it. This expresses the literal truth of what happens, for Protagoras is no longer speaking loosely in saying it, but with theoretical exactitude, or else his answers to previous difficulties will not stand. We now have contrary appearances in the same person, albeit the contrary appearances occur at different times. That is to say, (1) the principle is false for those who believe it so, for them, and later (2) it is not false for those same persons, again, for them. The qualifiers cannot be used now to wriggle out of the conclusion. The principle fails in some cases, at least. So the strategies introduced to avoid the contradiction of appearances have now failed, and the breach in the Protagorean defenses cannot be repaired. At least one public reality, common to all, has been revealed, and, clearly someone can have false beliefs about it, from his own perspective. I can know I was wrong (even though, of course, I cannot know I am wrong).298 Plato, then, presents an

296 Theaetetus 167c.

297 Theaetetus 171ac.

298 If we turn our attention back to the discussion of Protagoras in Chapter 3, we can note now that the person with the belief that the principle is false is not viewed as having a false belief here by someone else, so that P is false for him for him, but true for him for that other person, say, for Protagoras. So Protagoras never has to admit anything damaging and is not refuted. Now Protagoras has to admit that P was false for him for him (for his earlier and later self) even while it was true for him for him (for his later self). It was false for him for his later self, because his later self judges that he has changed and improved his opinion on the matter. It was false for his earlier self, because his earlier self thought it was false, as the later self notes. So we have succeeded in drawing a contradiction from Protagoras’s principle, and it must therefore be false.
argument that he knows can be escaped, and expects us to see that it can, and how, no doubt. But he has also given us all the tools we need in the immediately preceding discussion to block that escape if we wish to do it. He thinks the argument conclusive, then, and unless some entirely new means of escaping it can be uncovered, it is.

The fourth objection focuses on Heraclitus’s principle, given in the account of perception as occurring between perceiver and perceived, so that it is always becoming in between them, and is never to be identified with the thing perceived, so that it is a stable thing. That is granted by Socrates, as regards perception, but he thinks it cannot be true of every sort of knowledge, for to perceive something one must first conceive it, so as to form an opinion or judgement about it, and so the judgment must connect with a stable thing, not something arising between its object and the judgment. This is why he needs to introduce judgment into the picture, and a linguistic form for what is perceived, “that this is such and such.” Such a judgement can only be made if we know what this and such and such are. The argument of Parmenides appears once more in Plato, then, perhaps not in support of the Forms (which are never in fact mentioned as such in the Theaetetus), but in support of the necessity of a real world which is just what it is and not something else it is not, about which one can have beliefs that are just true, and not both true and false, or neither.

So assume that all things move and flow in all respects, so that nothing abides. We might try to say that something is white, and so we say, “what flows, that flows white.” We have to refer to what flows, and it cannot be characterized in any other way, for there is nothing that abides in just one character that can be identified by that character. No wood abides, no ivory. As long as we are speaking of what is really there, and not metaphorically and loosely, there are only passing series of instantaneous motions, and no way to pick one motion out from another, either in terms of what it is, nor in terms of its beginning and end, since they are likewise instantaneous motions. But perhaps we can say that “what flows, that flows white.” But white, also, flows, and is no more white, permanently for any length of time or in any respect, than it is not white. It is only a “becoming white,” not a state, but a motion, and a motion that never actually reaches its end, unless its end is just further motion. So there is neither any subject that can be referred to, nor any predicate that we can

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299 Theaetetus 182c–183c.

300 Does this mean that Plato has abandoned the theory of Forms? Some have thought so, but the general opinion now seems to be that it does not mean this. Still, he expands and reworks the theory of Forms to, making them, like everything else, knowable only through dialectic, in the Parmenides and Sophist, as we shall see next.

301 Theaetetus 182ce.
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understand to be asserted of the subject. So it turns out that those defending the Heracleitean thesis must use some language other than what we are familiar with, one that does not depend on identifying subjects and predicates and then associating them in true statements. In any language we mortals can understand, they can only say, perhaps, “not at all thus” while carefully avoiding defining the way in which not at all. (Don’t I mean, “in which it is not at all”? No, I can’t, since there is no identifiable it they can talk about. We must be careful to establish or assert nothing to speak with the Heracliteans.)

Plato has thus dealt with the hypothesis that knowledge is perception, that is, immediate and infallible perception of things, and established that it cannot be right, for we cannot even talk about things of which there is immediate and infallible perception. We can only talk about things that can be identified a second time for further discussion, that we can reason about, which we come to know through dialectical reasoning, associating them with all the other things that are, and seeing how they are related to them. There are truths about such things which are not at the same time falsehoods, truths that we can rationally be certain of. There is perception, perhaps, but only of things that are the subjects of dialectic as well.

Theaetetus’s notion that knowledge is perception has been defeated, it seems, since the sort of perception he has in mind, that is, infallible direct awareness which we can only have of the present, turns out to be impossible. At this point Socrates, discussing the consequences of his refutation of Theaetetus’s definition, points out that each of the senses seems to perceive (directly and immediately, of course) its own peculiar object, but that there are certain things we somehow are able to think and know about with which no particular sense would seem to make us familiar. So sight makes us familiar with colors (though not colored things), the ear sounds (but not the causes of sounds), but none of the senses has as its object things such as the like or unlike, same (identical) and different, the dual or triple, even and odd, good and bad, and, most especially, the being of things and their opposition to one another, all of which are nonetheless applied indifferently to all the objects of the particular senses. Theaetetus suggests that in grasping these common features of things, the soul functions, not through an organ, but through itself. Moreover, in perceiving things through the senses, it is a single soul that functions in every case—the senses don’t themselves perceive, but the soul through the senses. (One sign of this is the fact that when we perceive anything through the senses we can assess whether it is the same or different, good or bad, and the like.) Now, given that knowledge is of the truth, and the soul cannot get at truth without getting at being, it seems that it is a faculty or ability of the soul, judgment, say,

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\(^{102}\) Theaetetus 185de.
that enables it to grasp being, and the truth, and so to gain knowledge. This is not at all possible for or through the senses alone. So perception (alone, at least) is never knowledge. In view of this, Theaetetus proposes his second definition, namely that knowledge is true judgment.

So now the question is raised, how are false judgments possible? Given Protagoras’s arguments, it would appear that false judgment is impossible, since it must have as its object things that don’t exist, and, of course, such things don’t exist. So how does false judgment arise, given that it must somehow be produced by existing, true realities? It seems that when we judge something to be true, we must be aware of both the subject and the predicate in such a way that we can speak of them, for judgment is simply a kind of speech, speech to oneself. So

the soul when it thinks is simply carrying on a discussion in which it asks itself questions and answers them itself, affirms and denies. And when it arrives at something definite, either by a gradual process or sudden leap, when it affirms one things consistently and without divided counsel, we call this its judgment.

So whatever is a precondition for speaking meaningfully of something is a precondition for thinking it. And we have found that one can only speak of something if one has something definite in mind.

Two possibilities are considered. In the first place, perhaps there can be false judgments about sensibles, due to the passage of time. Our memories are responsible for the possibility here. It is like a wax tablet. A mark is made on the tablet for something, and this must connect to the right thing. How could one make a mark, intending it to refer to something before us, and somehow have it turn out to refer to something else? We may forget what it refers to, but it still refers to it. But then the mark gets associated with the wrong thing later, by being taken to refer to whatever is referred to by another mark freshly made. Someone is misidentified as Socrates, that is, the name “Socrates,” whose reference is fixed by its initial use, is misapplied to someone else, represented by a new mark, perhaps “that bearded, ugly fellow over there engaged in philosophical conversation with young men,” who, as it happens, is another philosopher. This is parallel to the critical objection made against Protagoras—it all hangs on the persistence of a single thing through time, which makes it possible to make more than one correct judgment about a thing. That, with language and memory, providing representation of things by which we can refer to them even when we do not have an immediate present awareness of them, is enough to make false judgment possible. The key seems to be that we can refer

\[\text{Theaetetus 186e.}\]
\[\text{Theaetetus 189c-190a.}\]
to something and judge it to be the same as or like another thing, when we are no longer immediately aware of the other thing.

But there are also judgments about intelligibles, such as equality. A mistaken belief in mathematics, say, cannot be given the same explanation. It is not that four is noted in the beginning, and a mark associated with it, so that it is later referred to using the mark even though we are no longer aware of it. We are always aware of four, or maybe we are never aware of it, but we do not become aware of it when it arises, as we do with sensory images, and in neither case can we make a mark in memory upon our first acquaintance with it, baptizing it, giving it a name so we can talk about it. So a new simile is introduced, that of the aviary. Here it is imagined that someone captures birds, which he keeps in a large cage, and so he “has” those birds. But when he wants one, he has to reach into the cage and grab it, and after that, he “has” the bird in a different, stronger sense. The aviary is to be stocked with the things one learns, which people teach him, including, Plato no doubt intends, those things we become convinced of through dialectical discussion. Thus, the distinction between perception of a thing and memory of it is replaced by a distinction between knowing or believing something and thinking of it, with the awareness that it is one of the things one knows or believes. Now we must imagine that somehow when we reach into the aviary, sometimes we get a truth, assuming that is all that the aviary is stocked with, but not the one we intended, and this is what happens when one makes a mistake in mathematics.

There are several difficulties here. One is the nature of the birds. Are they to be taken as statements we believe correctly to be true? That is the initial suggestion. Or are they to be taken as things, such as numbers, and all the subjects and predicates of the truths we believe? If the intended analogy with errors in perception and the wax tablet image is to be followed out closely, surely the second would be intended. But we are talking here about cases in which no mark is ever made (or bird made captive) upon immediate perception of a thing. Rather the birds represent what we have come to believe through discussion. So it seems that they must be statements. What is it to reach in the aviary looking for one proposition and come up with another? Well, in discussion we often enough reach for one proposition, say, one defining knowledge, or one providing an answer to some question we have, or one explaining something we have observed, and come up with another, one that fails in the task. We afterwards discover it fails through further discussion, and recognize our error. So let us take it, for the moment, that the birds represent beliefs or statements, not things those beliefs are about.

So might we take the wrong true proposition from our aviary? Of course, we might, if we take something that is true enough, but does not perform the task we had in mind. So we might take some true
proposition about knowledge, which does not express the real definition of it, and so fail to give an account what knowledge really is. But the question before us is how false belief is possible, and it certainly seems to be possible in mathematics, despite the fact that we never perceive the objects of that knowledge. Theaetetus cannot see how we can arrive at a false statement by picking among true ones. So he proposes, to Socrates's admiration, that the aviary may well contain many false beliefs, as well. After all, nothing about the way statements have gotten into the aviary guarantees their truth. These are simply statements we have come to accept through discussion (or perhaps for any number of other reasons).

In his refutation of Theaetetus's idea, Plato expresses things differently, so that the aviary is filled, not with beliefs or statements, but instead things, or perhaps concepts, such as five, seven, and twelve. In his example, say one reaches for the answer to “what is five and seven?” and gets “eleven” instead of “twelve.” We are asking about something, “what is this?” and identify it both as “five and seven” and as “eleven,” then. What has happened? Plato suggests: (1) He knows both knowledge and ignorance, that is, he knows a correct answer (this is five and seven) and an incorrect answer (this is eleven) to the question, and he thinks error (his belief that this is eleven) is knowledge (his belief that this is five and seven). This seems impossible, of course, for no one thinks error is knowledge. (2) Perhaps he knows neither knowledge nor error (or eleven and five-plus-seven), and so does not judge the one to be the other—but then he can make no judgement about it at all. (3) Perhaps he knows one only, knowledge or ignorance, eleven or five-plus seven, but not both, and judges that the one he knows is the one he doesn’t know—again, no judgment can be made unless he knows both. (4) He mistakes the one he doesn’t know for the one he does—this draws the same reply, no judgement can be made. This last point is difficult to see at first. What Plato is doing here is dropping the notion that we pick out something first, then identify it as five-plus-seven, and then as eleven. We start off simply identifying five-plus-seven. This would have an advantage, of course, for it is rather hard to see how one can pick something out unless he identifies it as something (as Parmenides had noted). But now we have lost our account what we are doing when we say “five and seven are eleven.” We do not ask, “what is five and seven,” and start looking through the whole aviary. Rather we pick out five and seven, and then, holding on to that, we search the aviary to see if we can find it again! But we already have it, and how can we mistake anything else still flitting around in the aviary for what we have in our grasp?

The difficulty seems to revolve around the connection we make between the predicate and the subject of the statement we are mistaken about. It is suggested that the two are connected inasmuch as we identify one “this,” which we must know if we are to form an opinion at all about anything, by two different descriptions.
This leads to the first three cases. Then, given the outcome thus far, the suggestion is retracted, but now no way of connecting the predicate and subject is provided at all.

No resolution is provided for the impasse here, but we can see, after looking at the *Sophist*, what was surely intended. Option (1) should have been chosen. He knows both knowledge and ignorance, and he thinks ignorance is knowledge. How is this possible? Someone may think that what participates in ignorance in fact participates in knowledge, *even if it is a Form*, and even though he makes no mistake about what knowledge and ignorance are essentially. This does not require giving up on Forms, although Plato may give up on direct perception of the Forms—they are known only through dialectic. What it requires is that (1) we see that Forms participate in one another, and so a Form can participate in being known, and participate at the same time in not being known, and (2) assuming that Forms are considered objects of knowledge, that different descriptions of the same (kind of) being identify different Forms. Eleven is known, as regards what it is, its essence, perhaps, but it is not known, as it is other than five and seven. Five and seven is known, as regards its essence, but not as regards its being twelve (its participating in sameness as regards twelve). Twelve also is known as regards its essence, but not as regards its being five and seven. So eleven, five-and-seven, and twelve, each participate both in being known and in not being known. This would mean, it seems, that we do not simply have, or fail to have, some item from the aviary in our hands, for they are not unitary in a way that will allow that. To know “five and seven” is to know it under a certain aspect, and while knowing it we might well fail to know it, or have false views about it, under other aspects. So the aviary image, since it only allows us to have, or not to have, any particular item in it in our hands, and not both at the same time, is a bad analogy for knowledge.

But Theaetetus does not see this, and so it is assumed that none of the four choices so far are any good. Socrates proposes one further option that might have put Theaetetus on the right track. Let us assume that the aviary is filled with true and false beliefs. To make a judgment, we pick a belief from our aviary, and then proceed to make a judgment about the belief, namely that it is true. But this quickly runs into trouble, for if it is a false belief, so that we are wrong about it’s being true, we will have not one, but two false beliefs, the belief we picked, and the additional belief that that belief is true. But where did this new belief come from? He has, it seems, mistaken a piece of ignorance for a piece of knowledge, but he must have gotten both these two different beliefs from somewhere. If we follow out the line of reasoning we have been using, we would have

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[305]If the reader is not confused enough already, consider this: *Are* they two different beliefs? What does my belief that that another belief is true add to that other belief? Do I really assert two different things if I say, “not only is Josie a good dog, but it is even true that she is a good dog”?
to suppose an additional aviary, or fill our old aviary with additional birds, all those pieces of knowledge and ignorance concerning the statements already in the aviary. But there will be no end to that, for, of course, we believe about our belief that the judgment is true, that it is true. To come to know that seven plus five is twelve, we shall have to put an indefinite number of birds into our aviary: (1) that knowledge; (2) the knowledge that (1) is knowledge and not ignorance; (3) the knowledge that (2) is knowledge and not ignorance; and so on. Surely that is absurd, so it seems that we need some other strategy entirely. Socrates points out that we have to know what knowledge is to see the reply to this objection. We might have said, this tells us something about knowledge, if we could only make out what it is.

He is out of defensive resources, but Theaetetus still has nothing to improve on his definition. So Socrates now suggests another, rather plainer refutation of it that suggests the last definition to be considered, the definition we have already seen in the *Meno*. What he does is to point out that expert politicians don’t cause people to know what the best course of action for the city is, say, but they do persuade them that it is this rather than that. That means, of course, that they get them to place a belief in their aviary, possibly a false one. This is something they are now committed to. Indeed, the belief may even be true, but still, we would not say these folks knew it to be true, for they don’t know why it is true. So truth is not enough to make a belief knowledge.

Theaetetus, with this much as a hint, now recalls someone saying that knowledge is true belief with an account, and going so far as to hold there is no knowledge of things which have no account to be found. It is surprising, he seems to think, that some things should turn out not to be knowable at all. Socrates has heard this, too, it seems, and so it is taken as the new effort at a definition. Socrates apparently heard this account in a dream. Surely this is a portrayal of recollection of some truth learned, perhaps in an earlier life, as one might expect from the doctrine of the *Meno*. The recollection would have been, not a recollection of experience of a Form, which even in the *Phaedrus* cannot occur during life, while the soul is in the body, but a recollection of some earlier discussion, in an earlier life, in which the dialectical process established this as the correct account of knowledge.

According to this dream, Socrates says, the primary elements of things have no account, precisely because they have no structure to be described in an explanatory account of their characteristics and behavior. Among the Pythagoreans, giving a mathematical account would, of course, always involve revealing some

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\[306\text{Theaetetus }200d–201c.\]
structure, and so one might not be able to give an account of a point or a one, the elements from which geometrical figures and numbers arise. These things can be given a name, however, that is, they can be talked about. They cannot be known, but they can be taken note of, or perceived. Perhaps some primary elements, those of natural things, say (sensible qualities?), can be perceived.\footnote{Or perhaps not? Aristotle suggests in \textit{Physics} I 1 that the first things available to our perception are confused complexes, the elements of which become clear only later through analysis, and then identifies the analysis with an account (\textit{logos}). He seems to be taking a Platonic viewpoint here.} but if particular sensibles turned out to have no essence of their own, as Forms do, but simply to be thises and thats, which are capable of participating in the Forms, but have no exemplary formal content themselves… then it seems that particulars as such would be unknowable, and they could only be known as they share in the Forms. This might look like a good way of presenting the view of the Forms and particulars we have seen in the Middle Dialogues.\footnote{Of course, it does not account for how we know the first principles of mathematics, for they are not sensible! Moreover, it may be that there is a science of the Forms, as well, whose first principles might be being, sameness and difference, and the like, and these things are not perceivable, as was argued earlier in this very dialogue. The view suggested here is Cornford’s “two worlds” view, with which I disagree, mentioned earlier in Note 254.}

Socrates develops his objection to this account by comparing the situation to one in which we take the letters to be the principles of the syllables in Greek, and the syllables the principles of words. Clearly the idea is that the structure of words is to be presented in their definition, and that is taken to be the spelling of the words. (This is \textit{not} intended as an account of names, for which one must turn to the \textit{Cratylus}, but rather of words, in Greek, say.) Now a letter has no structure, in these terms, at least. It is simple, and so no account can be given of it. A letter does not have a spelling. But, it seems, to know the things made up of letters, syllables, we need to know the letters. So all knowledge is impossible if knowledge of the simplest, primary elements is.

Perhaps a syllable is itself a simple thing, not a mere collection or arrangement of letters, but something with its own nature that cannot be explained by its structure in terms of letters. But then a syllable has no parts. So perhaps the whole, the syllable, is something different from the sum of its parts, and the parts are parts of the sum. Socrates, bent on showing that the whole and the sum cannot be distinguished from one another, then argues thus:

Won’t this very same thing—that from which nothing anywhere is lacking [i.e. the sum]—be a whole? While a thing from which something is absent is neither a whole nor a sum.

Theaetetus agrees that it seems the whole and the sum are the same. He is likely mistaken to do so. But in any
case, the consequence is that the syllable has no parts. But then, it turns out to be unknowable. That is, the only way to give an account is to deal with something made up of parts.  

It seems that an observable natural thing has two aspects. Under one aspect, it has parts (say the parts of the human body), and is a structure composed of parts to be understood through its structure. Under another aspect it is one, that is, a single unified thing, and taken in this second way we might speak of it “acting as a unity.” So we say that Janet ran, rather than describing the movements of her parts, and we take it that an account of Janet’s running would involve such a description of movements of her parts. Now we have seen that Plato takes it that actions attributed to a human being cannot be explained entirely in terms of the structure of the matter making it up. This was argued in the Phaedo, in Socrates’s objection to Anaxagoras’s talk about Mind as the source of all things. Indeed, soul seems to be the source of all motion, in the end, and so the action of Janet, taken as a unified thing, and of things similarly unified, explains the motions that occur in the world. The motions don’t explain Janet’s actions. The soul, of course, responds to ends and desires, and moves the body as a whole to accomplish its ends. The explanation in terms of structure, then, however much it may satisfy a mathematician, is not enough to satisfy the natural scientist, who must account for motion. Structures don’t move, but are rather moved. Left to themselves, they just sit there, nicely structured.  

If they move it is because the things making them up do. An account will have to include reference to unified souls, which bring their unity to bodies, and the ways in which the soul use a body to accomplish its ends. Not only mathematical understanding, but teleological understanding rooted in the good, must play a role.

A second problem is that of accounting for knowledge of the primary elements that seems necessary if we are to know the structures made up from them. These elements may be taken to include not only physical parts, but also souls and whatever is primary in the explanation of the soul’s behavior, that is, the good. There seems to be two strategies available here. One could deny that there is any knowledge of the elements at all, and argue that knowledge can arise from mere acquaintance with the elements, if that can be joined to an account. It is, perhaps, the illusion that we must know the elements to know the whole that leads to the 

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309 Given the discussion we have already seen of the ways in which a thing is One in the Parmenides, Socrates should surely say that a syllable is both one and many, and knowable at least insofar as it is many (!), that is, made up of parts mentioned in its definition. But surely a syllable is known as a syllable only as it is One, that is, as it (not its parts) participates in a Form? But it can be known as a One only insofar as it has parts. All this, though paradoxical, perhaps, is perfectly consistent, of course, but Socrates is clearly not up to the vision required of him here.

310 Unless, of course, they contain simple elements that move of themselves. But they don’t move because of the way the elements are put together, then, but because of the sorts of elements put together.
supposition in the first place that knowledge is some kind of perception. A second strategy might argue that we do know the elements through the account of the whole. Plato might have accepted that we could know the primary elements of things by seeing how they fit into the wholes they compose. One can’t know a primary thing simply by perceiving it. One must see it as a primary thing, and so one must see how it fits into the structures it fits into. This is not giving an account of a primary thing in terms of its part and structure, but perhaps it is giving an account of it, in the end, in terms of its purpose or end. We need to see what good can be accomplished by these simple things in their combinations with other simple things, and how the structures they enter into contribute to those goods.\textsuperscript{311}

The final question raised in the dialogue is what an account is. Three suggestions are made. An account may be (1) the expression of a thought in language, so that one gives an account of what one thinks.\textsuperscript{312} But that will not turn a true thought into knowledge, for it only suggests that one knows what one thinks. (2) Perhaps an account is instead a definition of a thing in terms of its parts.\textsuperscript{313} The objection here is difficult, but it seems to be that simply knowing the parts and how they are put together is not enough to know. The example is given of “Theaetetus” which is apparently not known simply in virtue of knowing the letters and their order. The reason is that if one can write “Theaetetus” one ought to be able to get a start on “Theodorus,” and only if one knows that “The” is done with “t” “h” and “e” does one know “Theaetetus.” So (a) to know the name one must know the syllables, and how each is put together, not just the word as a whole, and (b) one must recognize the letters and syllables in their roles in composing other names, so that one knows the whole writing system, and can write down any Greek word. This suggests strongly that we must know the elements, but the account is not enough to guarantee knowledge of the elements. Rather we need to see how the elements enter into accounts in general, so that we can spell anything with a theta, say. But rather than follow up these clues, Socrates then presents a third alternative. (3) An account may be a statement of a distinguishing mark by which a thing can be identified.\textsuperscript{314} But one must already know how it differs from other things to have a notion of it,

\textsuperscript{311}In modern mathematics there are undefined notions, which are given sense by the axioms in which they play a role, these axioms allowing for conclusions regarding these things, when taken together with all the other axioms in the system. Sometimes this is called “contextual definition.” That seems to be the notion Plato is onto. One understands what a point is, when one understands all the axioms of geometry and geometrical reasoning in general, and notes, to start with, which axioms mention points and how they relate points to other undefined items, such as lines.

\textsuperscript{312}\textit{Theaetetus} 206c-e.

\textsuperscript{313}\textit{Theaetetus} 206e-208b.

\textsuperscript{314}\textit{Theaetetus} 208b-210b.
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and it is supposed that one can have a notion of a thing (one can refer to it and talk about it) without having an account of it. The _Meno_’s paradox is referred to implicitly here—it seems that we must know it already in order to come to know about it. No doubt it should be replied that to get a knowledge of the difference is to come to understand what the thing really is, and therefore why it differs from other things in the ways that enable us to pick it out. Of course, somewhere we must light on what it really is, and this is not knowing a difference, but an explanatory definition.

So we are taken back to the second definition of an account. The objection to the second definition is in effect an objection to what has come to be called the Foundationalist account of knowledge. How do we know the simple elements making up the thing defined? Not by knowing their definitions, but rather by some kind of direct perception, we might say. But that, of course, opens us up to the objections raised against the notion that knowledge is perception. Possibly we could say that there are two sorts of knowledge, perception, and this second sort depending on an account. But the remarks of the Stranger here at the end of the discussion do not suggest that this is what Plato has in mind as an account of the knowledge of simples. Rather, he seems to think we know simples if we know how they enter into and make up more complex things whose accounts we know. The most reasonable conclusion, then, despite the professedly inconclusive finale to the dialogue, is that Plato holds to some variety of what is nowadays called a Coherence view of knowledge. To know anything, one must know a great deal else, in particular, one must know how it fits into a certain explanatory structure, as something explained in it, and as something explaining in it. Perhaps some things only explain, and some are only explained, but most will do both, and unless we understand at least some region of the structure in which the thing known is found, presumably a self-consistent region in some way complete in itself, we do not know that thing after all.

14. PLATO’S SOPHIST

It seems that there’s something of a battle of gods and giants among them… one group drags everything down to earth from the heavenly region of the invisible, actually clutching rocks and trees with their hands. When they take hold of all these things they insist that only what offers tangible contact is, since they define being as the same as body…the people on the other side defend their position very cautiously, from somewhere up out of sight. They insist violently that true being is certain non-bodily forms that can be thought about.
In the Sophist Plato tried to resolve fully the issues concerning the Forms posed in the Parmenides. The dialogue is ostensibly a discussion of the nature of the Sophist’s art, but the discussion is derailed in the middle by some puzzles concerning non-being. Here, as in the Meno and Republic, Plato puts the technical part, which addresses the core of his interests, in a long aside. The outcome is a sketch of the nature of linguistic meaning and truth that lies behind every later discussion of these matters in the West. The Sophist is as important for the Philosophy of Language as the Theaetetus is for epistemology. The problem giving rise to all this is that the Sophist’s art, it has been determined, is one of image-making. An image appears to be something, but is not what it appears to be, of course, but only an image of it. Image-making involves falsehood, and there are a number of difficulties about falsehood, that is, ‘saying things that are not’, as Greek allows us to put it. Note that the underlying subject is speaking or saying something, and Plato will eventually claim that to say something involves asserting or denying something, that is asserting or denying a verb (we would now say ‘predicate’) of something named. What is said is expressed in a sentence with a subject and predicate. Saying something is not naming something, though one must name something to say something, but predicking something (often, in some respect) of another thing. One says something about a thing. It is very helpful to have this in view when reading the dialogue, from the beginning. (It is also worth noting that this view is stated already in the Euthydemus, as observed in Chapter 4.4. This is not a new discovery or change of mind, but rather a more detailed discussion of a particular problem only quickly touched on in the Middle Dialogues.)

The first problem is, we want to assert that Falsehood is, but this cannot be unless ‘what-is-not’ is. (Here the Greek, ‘to me on’, though it would usually (outside metaphysics) mean “what is not” or “what is characterized by not-being,” can also mean “non-being itself,” suggesting a Form of non-being, parallel to Being Itself.) But Parmenides had said, “never let this thought prevail, that what is not [or “not-being”] is,” and if he is
right, it seems that falsehood cannot exist either, which is the position of Sophists such as Protagoras. Three arguments are given to support Parmenides’s supposed position on what is not. The first goes as follows: The designation “what in no way is” cannot be truly applied to anything that is. Whoever says-mentions (the Greek *legein* can mean either of these things) something must say-mention some one, definite thing. This is Parmenides’s fundamental insight, of course. Therefore, “something” is always used of or applied to something that is, and the designation “what in no way is” cannot be applied to any something. Now whoever does not say-mention something says nothing, and so such a person does not even speak, but says-mentions nothing. So one who says what-in-no-way-is does not even speak, but says nothing. This argument seems to work as long as we are speaking of what in no way is, but Theaetetus thinks the conclusion applicable to what in *some* way is not, and he is wrong about that, for what in some way is not may also in some way be. As long as we take “what is not” to mean “what in no way is,” Parmenides’s own argument for his position works, but, of course, it does not follow from this position that there is no falsehood.

We have noted that in Republic V (475d–480a) Plato speaks of “what in no way is” intending to mean what is in no way *true*, and says that it is the appropriate object of error, just as what in every way is is the object of knowledge, and what in some way is and some way is not is an object of mere opinion. We saw that his intention there was that “what in no way is true” describe a statement that cannot be made true with any limiting qualification at all, so a statement that, taken as it stands, is straightforwardly false. What in every way is is a statement that is straightforwardly and unambiguously true as it stands. What in some way is is a statement that in every way is once we introduce a limiting qualification. For instance, “the cat is on the mat” now, perhaps, though this not true at another time, or the turtle is slow, considered as an animal, even if it is.

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318 Plato has moved beyond a consideration of Socrates’s views at this point, as he had in the *Parmenides*, and here Socrates does not even get to be interlocutor. His usual place is taken by the Eleatic Stranger, a visitor from Elea and a participant in a philosophical discussion group there that began with Parmenides. He presumably inherits whatever insights Parmenides and Zeno had in the *Parmenides*. His respondent is Theaetetus, whom we have met already, and who makes active moves in the discussion, at least anticipating the Stranger’s drift and confirming his points, even if he is clearly his philosophical inferior. At the end of the *Theaetetus* Socrates had announced that he was to answer the charges of Meletus the next day, and would not show up until after that, so perhaps this is the next day, and Socrates is going through his trial and imprisonment as the discussion proceeds.

319 *Sophist* 237b–e.

320 The argument is talking about the phrase “what in no way is,” not about what in no way is! This first assumption can be granted as a defining what that phrase means.

321 It is assumed that to speak is to say *something*, so to speak meaningfully.

322 This needs more careful formulation, no doubt. Try, “One who utters “what it is no way is” does not even speak.”
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a rather speedy turtle. The point of this is to insist that something can be known, because a sentence that is entirely true in itself without further limiting qualification can be said, and so the Sophistic trick we found Euthydemus and Dionysidorus so fond of in the *Euthydemus*, asserting that something is which in fact only in some way is, and then introducing a qualification that makes it false once one has agreed to it, does not always work. When it does work, it suggests that the sentence in question can be limited so that it entirely is, and if such a sentence cannot be uttered with that predicate concerning a sensible particular (as with ‘x is slow’), this may support the position that one cannot know that predicate to belong to a sensible, but only as the predicate is not further limited (the turtle is a slow animal). Moreover the predicate without further limitation must perhaps belong to a proper paradigm of what falls under the predicate, so that it cannot be misapprehended, and that grounds an argument for the Forms (the Form of the Slow). Can what is in no way true be spoken? Surely, we want to say, it can, even if what in no way is any (sort of definite thing) cannot be spoken of, since it cannot be identified, described, or referred to.

The second argument for Parmenides’s position in the *Sophist* draws on a different form of his principle that what one says or mentions is something, namely that it must be one thing, or perhaps several, but even then some definite collection of ones. He begins by asserting that something that is can be attributed to what is, but not to what is not. Now oneness and plurality are, and so they can only be attributed what is, not to what is not. So one cannot say or mention what is not. Plato now expands his conclusion, holding that what is not cannot be conceived, and we cannot reason about it. As in the first puzzle, his conclusion is valid only concerning what-in-no-way-is, not concerning what in some way is not.

In the third place, Plato suggests that we are forced to contradict ourselves even to refute non-being, since we do have to mention it to argue about it. This absurdity is let in by the fact that Plato has by this time dropped the longer phrase “what in no way is” for “what is not,” without comment on the different meaning of the two phrases, allowing Theaetetus to slide freely to the conclusion that what in any way is not cannot be spoken of.

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123 *Sophist* 238a–c.

124 *Sophist* 238d–239b. Does Plato in the end, attribute to Parmenides the view that “what is not” cannot have any meaning? Initially he says as much, but he also establishes, as we see, that “what is not” can be interpreted in a number of ways, and ends up allowing that Parmenides is right about this in one sense, but wrong about it in another. The question, of course, is whether he thought Parmenides ever intended his dictum in the sense in which it is wrong. The *Parmenides* suggests that Plato thought Parmenides did not, and did not mean to deny the possibility of speaking of what-is-not in any way that rules out the possibility of falsehood, even if he does not return to Parmenides after he is done to straighten out what his views were once things are made clear. Probably Plato thought that Parmenides held to the same views he did on the matter of non-being, or at least that Parmenides would have accepted those views had they been suggested to him, but he leaves the application of his distinctions to Parmenides to be worked out by the reader.
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said. The problem here evaporates once we see that the arguments so far only bear on what-in-no-way-is, and note, of course, that we can talk about the phrase “what in no way is not,” even if we cannot assign it any reference to anything.325

Having made the crucial slide from what-in-no-way-is to what-in-some-way-is-not, Plato now concludes that there can be no false opinions, since they think what-is-not, and think that what-is-not is. At this point Socrates says outright that we need to hold that in some way what-is-not is, and what-is is not, subjecting Father Parmenides’s statement to further examination.326 (Subjecting it to further examination, of course, may involve clarifying what is meant in it rather than rejecting it.) The explicit resolution of these difficulties is only given after a long discussion of further problems. It depends on a distinction between different ways in which a thing can be. Something can be F by participating in the Form of F, or it can be F in and of itself. This latter means it is F in its exemplary content, it is the Form of F, and though a Form may participate in itself (Being does), it need not do so (Change does not). So the Form of Non-Being’s content is… well it has no content at all. It is like the Empty Set in modern Set Theory, which has no members, and Plato is not willing to entertain such a notion. If we are to identify a Form it must be a Form of something. But what-is-not might well be what does not participate in a certain Form (is not a cat) even though it does participate in others (it is a dog, and thanks the Lord for that). So what-is-not, the Stranger says, can be spoken of, only this is not what in no way is, but rather what is not in some way even though it is in another.

Here we might observe that Plato assumes that the Form of F is F in itself, and this seems to imply, at least verbally, that the Form of F is F (that is, it is the same as, or identical to F). So he speaks of the Form of Change as Change itself. Of course the Form of F need not participate in F, as Change itself does not participate in Change, but it may, as Being itself participates in Being. In this sense, Plato holds on to the “self-predication” assumption, that the Form of F is (identical to the) F (itself). But he cannot identify the Form of F as a paradigm of F, now, since it is not F in any way that makes it similar to the many F’s, both sensible and ideal. Change itself does not change. Moreover, even if Being itself is, this has no relevance to its being the Form of Being, for Change is, too, and is not (identical to) the Form of Being. In the Sophist, then, Plato abandons the paradigm account of the Forms, and for this reason has sometimes been said to have abandoned

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325 We can even pretend to argue using it, to show that if we take it seriously it turns out to have no use and casts us into absurdity.

326 Sophist 241d.
the theory of Forms altogether. I would not go that far, though, and would say, instead, that he has a new theory of participation, having abandoned the resemblance-to-a-paradigm theory. We shall see in a bit what this new theory is.

Before presenting these solutions to the puzzles about not-being, the Stranger gives us a second set of puzzles concerning what-is, or being, and suggests that these puzzles should be answered together with those concerning what-is-not, that any light thrown on the one set of puzzles will reflect upon the other. He begins with the question just how many things there are. He reviews the older physical thinkers, some of whom suggest that what is is two or three things, or and some that what is is only one thing (the latter includes, he says, the Eleatics), and some that there are at the same time, or in alternation, both many and one only. He claims that the meaning of all this is unclear. First, say there are two principles, Hot and Cold (like Parmenides’s principles in the Way of Seeming). Then both are—hot is, and cold is. The two together is not the same as either one alone, and certainly they must be on this scheme, and so there are three beings here, in that case. So if someone insists that all things that are are two, the Hot and the Cold, he is wrong. If there are these two, there is a third thing which is, Being itself. Perhaps being is all the beings at once, but then it seems each of these beings is being, and so they are identical to one another and there is only one thing. Clearly we need to distinguish being identical to being from sharing in being to avoid this absurdity, though the Stranger does not say so here.

Even those who say there is but one thing face this problem, for they do say that this being is one. But then, they give it two names. But this is absurd, if they really are two different names, for different names

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108Sophist 242c.

129On the view I have developed of Parmenides, and Plato’s reading of him, here, what-is would be one, according to him, in the sense that whatever is shares in Oneness. What-is might well be many in the sense that there are several things that are that are different from one another, and the Stranger proceeds to argue a little later that there must be at least two things, since the One itself is different from Being itself. So if there is one, and so the One (for this one to share in), there must be two things. It is worth observing that Plato’s analysis of a sentence into subject and predicate is at work here. One does not just name the one in saying that one thing is, but names a one, and predicates being of it. If one were to restrict oneself to saying “it is,” then one would name something that is, and predicate being of it, so there would still be a distinction present between the Form and its Participant. Perhaps one could say “Being itself is (identical to) Being (itself),” and restrict one’s ontology to one thing? But the meaning here is that Being is the Same as Being, and Sameness is not being. To simply say something all by itself is not possible. This suggests that a paradigmatic Form is not possible, and participation is not resemblance to a paradigm.

129Sophist 243e. If this does not seems absurd, consider that given three things, there must be four, and given four there must be five, and so on.

130Sophist 244b.
name different things. Recall the discussion of names in the *Cratylus*, in which a single name could have any number of embodiments in different sounds, as long as it named the same thing, so that the identifying essence of a name lay in its meaning. Here, of course, the two names are clearly different names, for they name different things, the one, and being. The difficulty can be amplified, for a name must have an account of it saying *what* it names, and so if there is even one name for the one, the name will be different from the one, which it names. Or perhaps the one is its own name, in which case it is only the name of a name, which is surely absurd.

For a third difficulty, the Stranger proposes that what is must have parts, as even Parmenides claims, saying that it is a sphere with parts. But then, even if it is one, it is not *just* one, for it is also several, since it is its parts. It seems a whole made up of parts is one, and not one. Yet more absurd, the whole itself, what is, will be less than all of what is, for it differs from its parts, which also are. And so the absurdities pile up.

This is all difficult enough, but there is also a more modern dispute between materialists and those who hold that what really is is the Forms. The Stranger allegorizes this as a battle between the Gods and Giants, the Gods representing the Friends of the Forms, and the Earth-born Giants those who think only material things exist. That the Materialists wind up the enemies of the Gods is no accident here, of course, dramatically speaking, for Plato thinks that materialists tend to atheism.

To adjudicate the dispute between these two warring camps, the Stranger suggests that the Materialists need to say what it is that they see to be in common in bodies that makes them say that they are, and he proposes that this would be the capacity to act on, or suffer action from, another thing that is. He then puts the same question to the Friends of the Forms, who apparently allow that bodies exist, but do not share this capacity for causal interaction with Forms, since Forms are unchanging. What is it that marks being for Forms, then? Perhaps we can say that they hold true being because they have no involvement with non-being, and this is why they have no involvement with change, and are what they are, perfectly and eternally and unambiguously. But, the stranger asks

are we going to be convinced that it’s true that change, life, soul, and intelligence are not present in that which wholly is, and that it neither lives nor thinks, but stays changeless, solemn and holy, without any understanding?333

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331 *Sophist* 244e.

332 This would be a mark of what is for the Materialists, not a definition, nor is it ever claimed it is a `definition.

333 *Sophist* 248e-249a.
Theaetetus admits that this would be a frightening prospect (presumably because it would imply that the world is not ordered to the Good), that surely what wholly is has understanding, and even life and soul. What changes and change itself must both have being.

Now at this point one might well suggest that Theaetetus is just wrong, and that what-wholly-is is parallel to that-which-in-no-way-is. It must be free of non-being of every sort. So if there is such a thing to be meant or thought of, of course this thing thought of does not involve change, and that means it does not involve knowledge, soul or life. It participates in none of those things. But is what wholly is alive in its exemplary being? Perhaps we should say it is if what is meant is that it is necessarily related to what is alive, since it is knowable, is part of what it is to be Being, and what is known is known by the living. Moreover it is changing in its exemplary being, inasmuch as it is necessarily related to changing souls that come to know it (not that its exemplary being or content changes—that would mean that what wholly is changes in its being as a Form, and in that way it is changeless, and is not alive, that is, it does not participate in change or life). But to say these things one needs to give a fuller account of what exemplary being is, and allow that one Form can be related to another not only by participation in it (in the way that being is changeless), but also in another way, inasmuch as the other enters into, is mixed in with, its exemplary content, for the necessary connection between knowing and being can only hold in virtue of the exemplary content of what is. These things will be allowed in just a bit, after the Stranger introduces the notion of the Mixing of Forms, but are not yet available for deployment. So all the Stranger can do now is insist that the Friends of the Forms allow some account how knowledge of the changing world occurs, and that means they must allow Forms of the Changing, and the like, though Change Itself, and every other Form, is unchanging, of course. There have to be Forms of the things in the natural world we know, and those Forms have to allow whatever sort of interaction with minds must occur to make them known. That means that Forms in some way are not, when they are not known to someone, and they change and come to be when they come to be known. But of course, this sort of change (Cambridge change, some call it) only affects Forms as they participate in other Forms, not in their exemplary content.

Now Plato mentions certain young people and old “late-learners,” who insist that nothing can be predicated of anything different from it. They reject the possibility of saying that a man is good, and only allow that what is good is good. They seem to want to reduce predication, we should say, to making an identity statement. To say a man is good is to say that Man and Good are identically the same thing. In the end they do not allow us to speak of things that participate in the Forms, but only of the Forms as they are themselves.
These are the “Gods” in their most extreme form. The “Giants,” of course, at their most extreme, might not allow us to speak of Forms at all, but only of things that share in them, so that all things turn out to be mixed with all things, since everything that is anything is also, in some respect, not that thing.

This completes the statement of the problem. Of course, we already have a part of the solution in the twin distinctions between the exemplary content of a Form and its being as a Form, and between being F in its exemplary content, and being F by participation. This has been reinforced with the explicit admission that some things have no exemplary content, and these are changing things (that is why they have no exemplary content), though, of course, Change itself is not one of them, but another unchanging Form. But something more is required to deal with the issue how Forms can be knowable and yet unchanging. Say we know that hot things expand by nature. Then this ought to be knowable through knowledge of the Forms of the Hot and the Expanded. Now hot things are expanded through participation, of course, but neither of these Forms is, not even the Form of the Expanded. The relation between the participants when a hot thing expands must somehow be echoed in the exemplary being, the content, of the Forms. But so far all we can say about a Form’s exemplary content is what it is a Form of. What we need is for the exemplary content of the Expanded Itself to somehow be related to the exemplary content of the Hot Itself. Now in fact we will need any number of such relations between Formal contents corresponding to the various relations between participants in the Forms that we can understand through the Forms. Simple predication will only be the beginning. So the Stranger here speaks of the Forms “blending,” so that the Form of A (the Expanded) blends with the Form of B (the Hot) if A’s exemplary being is somehow implied or understood in understanding B’s exemplary being. All the knowable relations, causal and otherwise, between things in the world of sensible participants in the Forms must be echoed in these blending of the Forms, so that the causal structure in the world is an image of the blending of the Forms. (If you wish, the blending of the exemplary content of the Forms occurs also in particulars, as though the exemplary content were found simultaneously in the Form and in the particular that

334 Sophist 251a–d.

Some scholars prefer to speak here of the identity of two Forms (or sensibles) as opposed to something (perhaps another Form) sharing in the Form. Plato never works out an explicit account of identity-statements vs. predications, though he can certainly be exposed in that way, and I fall into it here and there myself. Moreover, the relation between two Forms whose exemplary content are related to one another is not necessarily one of identity. The Large not only shares in Being, it Mixes with it, since whatever is large is. But the content of the Large is not the same as the content of Being. Even further, the Servant Itself may have mixed in its content the Command Itself, but servants are not commands, but rather subject to them. For two forms to be identical they would have to have exactly the same content, not just have their contents mixed with one another. This brings us back to the late-learners, who hold that we can only say “X is Y” if “X” and “Y” have exactly the same content.
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participates in it, along with the exemplary content of other Forms.) So not all Forms blend with one another, but some Forms, such as Being, One, Many, Moving, and Being at Rest, blend with all other Forms. That means that Dialectic leads us to knowledge of this blending, so that we learn all these necessary, universal connections, which lie behind the particular causal connections we find in the world. A causal connection will occur when the content of one Form causes a thing participating in it to participate in some other Form, as with the Hot and the Expanding. It is not worked out in any more detail than that. This is a program, not an executed project, but it is a program that presupposes a world of Forms parallel to the world of participants in the Forms, and what goes on in the world of Forms depends entirely on the exemplary content of the different Forms and the ways in which they mix with one another. It also supposes that Forms themselves are understood by their participation in the Forms, so that each Form is one, and so on, and their capacity for being known. So the parallel structures are found not only (1) in Forms and Sensibles, but also (2) in a certain collection of Forms (Unity, Being, Difference and so on, the “Great Kinds,” Plato calls them) and the Forms considered as Forms, and (3) in certain bridging Forms (the Knower and Known), participation in which connects every Form with the souls that know them, and perhaps even (4) the Form of Participation, along with Similarity, or whatever connects forms and sensibles in the correct account of participation. Plato never pursues this fourth correspondence explicitly, unless it be in the attempts in the first part of Parmenides to understand what participation is. The reason is perhaps clear enough, for if all the rest is explained in terms of participation and essential being, it seems impossible to explain these two, without introducing some third metaphysical relation. The metaphors of the opening of the Parmenides will have to do, and our knowledge of participation and essential being will have to depend, as does our knowledge of the Good, on the place they take in the view of things inevitably developed by us through our dialectical procedures.

This is my promised new theory of participation. To participate in a Form is to have relations to other things in some class that are parallel to, have the same structure as, a set of relations found in the exemplary content of the Form. In modern mathematical terms, one might say that there is an isomorphism between the two sets of relations. But one cannot be simple-minded about this. Forms participate in Forms, and there are sets of exemplary relations in certain Forms that ground participation itself, and knowledge, and so are parallel

\[\text{Looking ahead to Aristotle, an attribute of a thing, caused in it by its essence, but not part of its essence, can be accounted for in this way. As the theory is elaborated it becomes, of course, more and more ad hoc, after the fashion of constructive metaphysics, and it ceases to be at all clear that we are explaining anything, rather than merely describing it with a particularly entertaining metaphor.}\]
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to relations between Forms and particular sensibles, and Forms and souls.

Finally, how does Plato deal here with the notion of identity? Many 20th-century commentators take the distinction between sentences involving predication and sentences asserting identity to be basic to solving Plato’s problems here. First, what about the identity of Forms? Plato proposes a proof that the five great kinds, Being, Change and Rest, Same and Different, are each of them Different from the others, arguing consistently for every pair that the content of the two Forms cannot be the same. For instance, the Different is always said in relation to another (reference to another is part of its content) which is different, but Being and the Same are said “by themselves,” not in relation to something else. So the structure of the content differs, and the Different cannot be the same as Being or the Same. For two forms to be the same, then, is for them to have the same exemplary content precisely, and surely we should take this sort of sameness to be identity. To identify or refer to a Form, then, involves indicating when we have the same Form or a different one, and that is to state the content of that Form with attention to its internal structure, the ways in which the contents of various other forms mix to constitute it. But that is not the only sort of identity. What if we ask after the identity over time of a particular sensible, or a soul? This would arise from participation in the Same. So we should note how the Same is related to Change and Rest so that Change always occurs in something that partakes of the Same, and, considered as it is (participates in) the same, is also at rest.

Plato, at the end of the discussion, works out the exact application of all this to the problems involving being and not-being. First, the meaning of negative statements is discussed. What is it to say that something “is not large”? This is not to say that it is, for instance, small, or has any other specific contrary to largeness, but only to “indicate something other than the name following the negation,” i.e. “Large,” “is about.” I think he means to say that “not large” indicates “different-from-large,” that is, the property F such that X is F if and only if X is not large. The point would be to free up a negation of a predication from the necessity to identify an opposite quality to the one assigned. We don’t have to say what it is, picking something that conflicts with being F, in saying it is not F. We only say it is “different-from-F,” imparting no information about what it is. So every Form with positive content is associated with a Form of that which differs from it, which arises from mixing its content with the content of the Form of the Different. The different-from-F is true of something if and only if F is not.

337 *Sophist* 255cd.

338 *Sophist* 257a–c. Here I take issue with Brown (2008), and adopt the “Oxford Interpretation” from Keyt (1973).
Finally, false speech is possible, for the content of the Form of Speech (meaningful utterance) must blend with what is and with what is not, that is to say, one can say what is, which is one kind of speech, true speech, or what is not, which is false speech. If it is objected that speech is only of what is, this might be granted, but only because speech always blends names with predicates, where the name names something, something that is, and the predicate asserts something about this thing named, again, something that is. So we might say “Socrates is tanned,” and being tanned is something, and Socrates is something. This is so even if it turns out that Socrates is not tanned, so that what we say (that Socrates is tanned) is false. Plato insists that one cannot speak (say something) simply by stringing names together, or simply by stringing predicates together. So, to say what is not, or speak falsely, is to name something that is and predicate something of it which, though it is something, is not with respect to what was named. False statements about a thing say something different than the things that are about that thing. To understand Speaking, we must understand that it involves affirmation and denial, then, and to understand belief, we must see that it is also involves acts of affirmation and denial, parallel to speech, but occurring silently within the soul. Belief that arises through sensory perception is appearance, and some appearances can be false. 

15. MATTER, FORMS AND NATURAL SCIENCE: THE TIMAEUS

And so now we may say that our account of the universe [of all that is] has reached its conclusion. This world of ours has received and teems with living things, mortal and immortal. A visible living thing containing visible ones, perceptible god, image of the intelligible Living Thing, its grandness, goodness, beauty and perfection are unexcelled. Our one universe, indeed the only one of its kind, has come to be.

Plato, *Timaeus* 92c

The *Timaeus* begins with a summary of the ideal state that has been described by Socrates in the *Republic*. Socrates has given an account of the ideal state on the previous day to a number of visiting

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Footnotes:

139 Sophist 261c–264b.

140 I take it that the perception spoken of here in the *Sophist* is sensory perception, not the immediate grasp of reality that is discussed and rejected as impossible in the *Theaetetus*. 
mathematicians and philosophers from Italy, presumably including the account of the education of the Guardians, and so of the Form of the Good as the source and explanation of all things. Also, presumably, he has developed the parallel between the soul and the state, as Timaeus, that one of the visitors most expert about such things, is about to develop the parallel between the soul and the universe. He now expects, in return, an account from his erstwhile audience of the actions of his ideal state once it comes into being. What will the living thing do in the world, how will it reveal its character in its wars and diplomacy, its interaction with other states? He is informed that Athens was once such a state, and became involved in a great war with Atlantis (located beyond the Pillars of Hercules in what we now call the Atlantic Ocean), successfully defending the Mediterranean basin from conquest. The story was supposedly preserved by Egyptian priests from 9000 years ago. Most of the world is cast back into barbarism periodically by rain-driven floods and punishing droughts, which occur in a regular cycle, but Egypt is largely unaffected by these disasters because it gets its water only from the Nile. Preserved there is the history of times before the most recent redevelopment of civilization in Greece. To launch the story, which will get to the actions of the state itself only in a sequel to this dialogue, the *Critias*, the speakers begin with an account of the origins of the universe and of mankind, to set the stage on which the ordering of human lives in accordance with the Good Itself takes place. As Socrates, having laid out the shape of the ideal state in theory, now wishes to see it in action, he will first see the Form of the Good in action in the cosmos, for the ideal state is, after all, but a piece of the cosmos.

The great mystery is how the Form of the Good can *actualize* itself in the universe, the grounds of its causal relation to the world. One would think somehow an Idealist theory, making the Form an intrinsically active Mind, would be part of the answer, but then we face the issue how the Mind’s activity eventuates not

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341 This is not the same recounting as occurs in the *Republic*, for it not only has a different audience, but occurs at a different time of year. See Cornford (1937), Introduction, for a thorough discussion of the dramatic circumstances of the dialogue. Cornford’s commentary here is superbly done, citing verbatim most of the Ancient comments on the work where appropriate, and informs my discussion throughout.

342 Cornford notes that Timaeus is unknown outside the dialogue, though a forged work by him, taking its stuff from the dialogue, was accepted in later Antiquity. So Cornford suggests that Timaeus was invented by Plato. What was needed was an expert in astronomy who was also a noted statesman, and none such was available at the dramatic date of the dialogue. He remarks that Archytas would have been suitable, but lived too late. The doctrines of Plato here, of course, need not be Archytas’s or, should he have existed, Timaeus’s. It is something of a pastiche of what Plato viewed as the most reasonable Presocratic speculation, but central to it, it appears, is the metaphysical view of Philolaus.

343 The story sketched here has clear parallels to the wars with Persia, but it does not seem likely that Plato meant to indicate that Athens before Pericles was an ideal state. Indeed, Hermocrates, whose task in the present enterprise is unclear, was the Syracusan leader who defeated the Athenian expedition of 415-413, and it is possible that we are meant to be reminded of the heroic accomplishments of the old Athens not by the new Athens, but by Hermocrates’s Syracuse, Athens taking the position of Atlantis!
only in thought and possibly knowledge, but also in actual states of affairs in the physical world. That mind or soul in all its actions looks to the Good, at least when that mind is not provided with the task of caring for a body as the human soul is, might seem plausible enough, and has already been suggested in the *Parmenides*, in Socrates’s notion that the Forms may be thoughts, and in the *Sophist* in the remark that surely the Forms somehow are involved in life and thought, and so presumably in change. One might wonder about the necessity of such a theory—can’t the world be understood without it purely in terms of its structure and the nature of its parts? And doesn’t there seem to be a great deal that is not good in the world? How can we explain the bad things, the lack of order? Again, one might wonder how it is that the mind in question acts physically—is it by serving as the Form of a body to which it is united? That is how our soul does it, presumably, but we can then ask how the soul comes to be connected to a body in the first place. Is it the action of another mind not connected to a body that brings about the connection? But now that action needs explanation, and we have gotten nowhere. Plato does not lay out the matter here in terms of this problematic, but rather tells the tale of the origin of things, but these are the problems that inform his tale.

There is another, related issue bedeviling the interpretation of the *Timaeus* from the beginning of its history. Did Plato intend his tale of the origins of things literally, so that he was recounting something he supposed to have taken place at some definite past time? Christian Platonists, especially, were often fond of that reading, but most commentators have supposed that Plato took the universe to have had no beginning, and intended the story of its production by the Craftsman that we shall be considering in a moment merely as an expositional device. Plato himself, it seems, stated that a chronological exposition was adopted in the *Timaeus* only for the sake of teaching, following the method of geometry. So, as the geometers exhibit the characteristics of a figure by “constructing” it, he exhibits the characteristics of the universe by showing how it must have been constructed had it actually been made. Nonetheless, the world has no beginning and never was constructed. Aristotle complains of Plato’s procedure. It is not like a geometrical construction, because in mathematical construction nothing is introduced that is not there in the final constructed thing, whereas in

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132bc, immediately objected to by Parmenides, and immediately followed by Socrates’s fourth suggestion concerning the Forms, that they are “like patterns set in nature, and other things resemble them and are likenesses; and this partaking of the forms is, for the other things, simply being modeled on them.”

Sophist 248e-249a.

the *Timaeus* the matter in disordered motion and the Craftsman are not part of the finished product.\(^{347}\) So we are not merely expressing an analysis of the parts of a thing and their relations to one another, under the guise of an account of its construction—we must actually be giving an account how it arose, assuming our procedure is legitimate at all. But Aristotle thinks it is not legitimate, and he himself, accepting that the universe always was, does not use it. The upshot would be that Plato thought the universe always was, and the literal existence of prime matter and the Craftsman in separation from one another, so that they could exist separately before the universe was produced, is to be rejected. The existing deity for Plato, if one is to be found, is the soul or Form embodied in the universe, which is the Form of the Good. How it came to be the Form of the universe is not a question that can be answered, since it always was. Reflecting on construction in geometry, we might notice that the person doing the construction, and his compass, paper or whatever else he uses, are not proper subjects of mathematics, and nothing is intended to be said about any of them in the final analysis produced by the construction. This *is* an account how a figure is drawn, but the lesson it contains for the mathematician resides, we might suppose, in the necessary truths that establish the possibility of drawing the figure, not in the actual manner in which the figure is produced. If we tried to read the construction of the world by the Craftsman in the *Timaeus* on similar lines, we should have to say that the lesson in it will consist in those necessary, eternal truths about the world that make such a construction possible. In order to give us an idea of the thing’s structure Plato talks about how someone might make such a thing, even though he knows that is not how it got here.\(^{348}\) In that case we would expect the account of the structure resulting from the actions of the Craftsman is to be taken seriously, and that it is somehow the case that the fundamental nature of the universe is such that if someone were to make it, this, the perfectly good Craftsman working with chaotic material and looking to the Form of the Good, would be how it would have to go. What does that suggest? That the world is a realization of the Good in material that is in itself disorderly, and must be ordered by a soul to receive that realization of the Good. Why is this? No reason why is given. At best one might give reasons to believe it is so, which might be expressed as an argument from design for the separate existence of matter.

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\(^{347}\) De Caelo 279b34–280a11. Compare the remarks concerning the generation of even numbers at *Metaphysics* XI 1091a23–29, and see the discussion of Finkelberg (1996), part I of the article, who cites the Ancient commentators on these texts in Aristotle to good effect. For Aristotle’s use of a fictional creator for the sake of exposition and analysis, see *On Coming-to-be and Passing Away* II 10, 336b27–34.

\(^{348}\) Somewhere Daniel Dennett remarks that one does not really understand a thing until he knows how to make one. He has in mind the understanding of an animal, a biological entity, and so does Plato, of course, for he takes the universe to be alive. Dennett does not imagine that animals *were* made.
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and the Craftsman, though, of course, they don’t exist separately. Since Plato intends to tell us nothing about how it came to be that sort of thing in the course of his tale, the objections we might raise to his account, in particular that the Craftsman himself must already have a soul of some kind, are aside from the point.¹⁴⁹

There have been other readings of the text. One later account how all this might work argued that the constructive event occurred, after all, and quite literally, but it did not occur in time. Rather, the Craftsman somehow acts eternally, or “in eternity” but “not in time,” when he makes the world, as Christian Platonists would argue. But Plato gives no clue that he intends that the Craftsman acted in this special way. It seems he never acted at all, and Plato only introduces his actions as a device of exposition. There is perhaps some causal relation between the soul of the universe (which does, of course, exist) and the universe, inasmuch as the soul keeps the universe in order, though it also depends on some aspects of that order for its own existence. Perhaps we could say that the order of the universe at any given time is due to the actions of its soul before that time, and its order immediately after now depends on the soul’s actions now. This could be regarded as an “eternal” or everlasting relationship, for it has always held and always will. This is what we get with Aristotle’s image of the outer sphere causing motion “eternally” in the Cosmos, by revolving.³⁵⁰ But the outer sphere is an unmoved mover, and the soul is not put or kept in order by anything else. It just is orderly, without being ordered. No Craftsman makes the soul.

But however that works, the story begins with the assumption that there was, at the beginning, “that which always” (at all times) “is and has no becoming,” and “that which always” (in every instance of its being) “becomes, but never is.”³⁵¹ The first describes the Forms, and the second sensibles. This is a different distinction than that between what is because it has essential being, or Formal content, and is the Form of something, and what is due only to its participation in some Form, the distinction we have seen developed in the Sophist and the Parmenides. The distinction here bears not on how the thing is, but rather when it is. The Forms have both participatory and essential being, but they have all essential being, and many forms of participatory being,

¹⁴⁹We ought not to take it that the making of the world is intended by Plato as a metaphor for something. The Craftsman is not metaphor, nor is his making the world one. Nothing corresponds to that part of the story at all, just as nothing in mathematics corresponds to the young fellow drawing the lines in the sand, or his compass.

³⁵⁰It might take time for the outer motion to communicate itself to one sphere after another until it penetrates to the Earth’s surface to produce the motions we observe around us. At least, if the linkages sphere to sphere are a little loose, it might take time. If they are perfectly rigid linkages, and no time at all is needed to communicate the motion from up there down here, it would seem there would be even less of a problem. Cause and effect would always be simultaneous, and the cause certainly should not be acting from eternity if the effect occurs at a particular time!

³⁵¹Timaeus 27d-28a. The parentheses indicate how it has to be read to be consistent with the Sophist.
always. Forms never change from being Forms, and never change their exemplary being—each has an account what it is, and it is always that. For this reason they are suitably taken as objects of understanding. The account we learn never fails. Sensibles, on the other hand, are always capable of change in every respect, if only, in the case of their essential natures, by ceasing to exist or coming into existence, but more to the point, they are what they are because of a change (or because of their participation in the causal order of things), because they have become such, not always having been such. Indeed, that they are as they are now always depends on events before the present moment. Nothing remains of itself without causal support of some sort keeping it in being. All the natural world is process. This clearly applies to an accidental quality of a sensible, such as the largeness of a rabbit, which it came to have as it grew up from a much smaller size. It also applies, however, to its being a rabbit, to what might be taken as its account through which it is understood and identified, for although it must be a rabbit if it is to exist at all, and so is inseparable from being a rabbit, it was not always a rabbit, for it was not always. It came into being, as a particular participating in the Form of Rabbit at some time, due to the operation of some cause, and it is only due to the continuing operation of favorable causes that it remains. So the distinction here is between Forms, which are what they are necessarily, and particular sensibles as such, which are what they are only because of their participation in the Forms, imitating them in continuing causal processes.

That may not be all there is to becoming. The notion is also intimately connected with the idea that time and space are indefinitely divisible, so that the present moment is no period of time at all, and so what becomes is for no time at all, but only in a momentary present. This is developed at length in Augustine’s *Confessions* X. These notions were associated with Heraclitus’s views, though they presumably were only fully developed after Zeno, who seems to have argued that such momentary being as is exhibited here is not being at all, and that any time must be a period of time of some definite length, and therefore to have denied motion, as discussed in Chapter 2 above. He held that everything that is must be for some definite period of time, and that includes the location of a thing. Thus things, in shifting from one position to another, must do so in little instantaneous jumps, so that they are in each position occupied for a definite period of time, and then pass on to the next position instantaneously without passing through intermediate places. This he took to deny “motion” as usually conceived, though, of course, such a quantized view of motion might turn out perfectly compatible with observation of what we suppose to be motion and change.

Plato accepts the infinite divisibility of time. We have seen becoming introduced in the *Theaetetus* as the equivalent of being for sensible qualities, which become *between* the thing sensed and the being sensing
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them, that is, due to the action of one upon the other or the interaction between them. Here we might think of becoming as occurring between adjacent periods of time, in the instant that marks the limit between them. Perhaps Plato’s thought is that within such an instant nothing can be, say, red or square, but only be coming out of, or entering into, a period of time in which it is red or square. If the present is precisely such a moment between periods of time, past and future, and if temporal, natural things are only in the present, then the reality of what they are seems to be determined by what they have been or will be, and is a becoming.

In the Middle Dialogues Plato identifies himself as Heraclitean, inasmuch as he recognizes that sensibles suffer from the compresence of opposites. That they do was the chief premise in the argument for the separation of Forms, which must be what they are without also being its opposite, if they are to be suitably intelligible paradigms. Now the Forms have turned out to suffer from a compresence of opposites as well, through their participation in other Forms, so that way of distinguishing Forms and Sensibles is not available, but Sensibles are not always what they are, since they are not eternal. The old argument for the separation of Forms would have to be modified, then, and insist that a proper paradigm must be always and in all ways what it is a paradigm of—so a paradigm of Rabbit must always be rabbit, and cannot cease to be so at some time. This would enable the extension of the argument for the separation of Forms to Forms of natural kinds. Was such an extension imagined by Plato all along? One can only say that in the Middle Dialogues it is not made explicitly, perhaps under the misapprehension that it need not be, since every sensible rabbit could be counted on to suffer from a participation in opposite qualities.352 But the Form of Rabbit suffers from opposite qualities as well. It is falling under a quality the opposite of that of which it is a Form that must be ruled out as impossible to Forms.

Plato does not suggest in the Timaeus that the Heracleitean/Protagorean world of pure sensibles elaborated on in the Theaetetus does not exist. It is just that perception of these things, without the involvement of knowledge of the Forms, is not knowledge, as the Theaetetus established. This is above all because such things manage to be the same as themselves, to possess identity, only in the instant of time in which they come to be as appearances, their causes, both object and perceiver, actively producing them. To gain identity stretching over a period of time, Plato will have to introduce souls. A rabbit has sensible qualities, but its rabbithood is not one of them. It has rabbithood because of its rabbity soul. It is clear in the Timaeus that the flux-ridden

352 Some such confusion seems apparent in the Parmenides, 29 ff., when Socrates remarks that he would be surprised to see the Forms subject to opposites, and then goes on to hesitate whether there must be Forms of natural kinds. These two confusions seem to be related.
world of appearance is real enough, for all the incoherent momentariness of the things in it, and for all its 
unintelligibility taken by itself, and indeed, it is knowable enough (and in one of the ways in which the Forms 
are knowable) inasmuch as it participates in the Forms. The Forms are, however, knowable not only as 
participants, but also as perfect exemplars of what they are, that is, through their essential natures.

It is not that Forms only have essential being, for they participate in other Forms. Rather sensibles do 
not have essential being, and so cannot serve as proper paradigms, since they are what they are only insofar as 
they share in what Forms are. They come to be what they are, then, and Timaeus asserts that “everything that 
comes to be must of necessity come to be by the agency of some cause.” But only one sort of cause is 
envisioned here as possible, for Plato goes on to argue that the universe, the All, is sensible (tangible and 
visible), and so is one of the things that becomes, and therefore, there must be a craftsman who has made it. 
But “whenever a craftsman” (demiourgos, hence the divine Demiurge) “looks at what is always changeless, and 
using a thing of that kind as his model, reproduces its form and character, then, all that he so completes is 
beautiful, but were he to look at a thing that has come to be and use as his model something that has been 
begotten, his work would lack beauty.” Now the universe, we can observe, is beautiful, and therefore it must 
be modeled on the Forms, not on something participating in them.

Two assumptions might be made to shore up this argument. First, there is always a precise cause of 
every effect, not a merely an accidental one, but one which produces precisely that effect necessarily. If the 
world is beautiful, it is not accidentally made such by something with no intrinsic connection to beauty. It is 
beautiful because of some cause that must necessarily, given its nature, produce beauty if it produces anything. 
In the end, that can only be a good craftsman looking to the Beautiful. In the second place, if the craftsman 
necessarily produces beauty it is because he aims to do so, and knows what beauty is. It is caused to be beautiful 
only if it imitates Beauty, and it does that only if a craftsman makes it with an eye to beauty. Otherwise it is 
beautiful by chance, and not caused to be so at all, save accidentally. It seems clear that a skeptic might well 
object that some things have only accidental causes, or, more subtly, that the universe causes us (through our 
evolution, and accidentally) to perceive it as beautiful, as it would cause anything capable of making aesthetic 
judgments that evolved within it to perceive it thus, and this is necessary because of the way evolution works

353 Timaeus 28a.
354 Timaeus 28c.
355 Timaeus 28b.
(it would be a non-adaptive trait to see the universe as ugly?). Of course, the skeptic would then have to give a rather different account of beauty than Plato does.

The result of the argument, then, is that the sensible, material world, if it is to be made, must be made by something non-sensible and immaterial, or at least that the raw material from which it was made must be shaped by such a thing into an orderly, good, beautiful thing. The second option is the one Plato adopts, for he immediately suggests that the sensible world is not perfectly ordered. In fact the Craftsman, aiming to make all things as good as possible, “took over all that was visible—not at rest but in discordant disorderly change—and brought it from a state of disorder to one of order.” Why was the visible not at rest, but in discordant disorderly change, before it was ordered by the Craftsman to the Forms? Because it could not be said that anything was for any period of time, since nothing in the visible was in either of the two ways a thing can be, at all. Nothing yet imitated the Forms, and nothing visible had the exemplary essential being the Forms have. Since it was not at rest, it was in change. But the change had no order to it, again, since the world was not shaped to the Forms. The world can only be understood as something intrinsically in disorderly motion, that comes to be ordered by non-sensible souls to the Good, which the souls understand. There is a force for Good in the world, but there is also a positive tendency to disorder, which amounts to more than mere resistance, and it takes the ministrations of a soul, giving a thing life, to overcome the disorder and create the particular sort of Good that is the life appropriate to that soul. This positive tendency to disorder manifests itself above all in the fact that sensibles never are what they are except by changing. It is through their orderly changes that they live the life of a rabbit, or even evince sensible qualities such as whiteness. The sensible thing is white, or a rabbit, over a period of time, but this is only because, as Augustine observes, it is white or a rabbit at each instant in that period, its existence being a moving now, not a true duration. Plato does not say this quite explicitly in the *Timaeus*, though, and in any case there is a second side to the story, for it is white only because of a process of interaction with the senses, and a rabbit because of the processes involved in its ongoing rabbit life. Change, if orderly change, is necessary for it to share in white, or rabbit, either one.

The disorderly motion of uninformed matter reopens the question whether the first mover must always be the soul, as we saw Plato held in the *Phaedrus*. What is the first mover behind disorderly motion? Of course, we might say that it is only in motion metaphorically, that literally speaking it is not at all, but that

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356 *Timaeus* 30a.

perhaps denies too much the reality of matter, which enters into the world just as essentially as do the Forms. Perhaps the first mover is to be taken as the first mover \textit{whose change is intelligible}. Or more to the point, it may be that one cannot identify a mover at all in dealing with the disorderly motion. This motion is not caused, that is why it is disorderly, and so there is no cause or mover for it.\footnote{Since it is disorderly, presumably it does not follow impersonal natural laws. Plato would take the notion of a law here quite literally, pointing out that it is imposed somehow by reason. If we assume, with David Hume, that natural laws are permanent and unchanging features of the world without any explanation why they are so, then there is no reason why they hold. Perhaps Hume’s picture is one of an orderly disorder. In any case, Plato does not conceive it as possible. His disorderly motion is \textit{really} disorderly, and so not governed by laws at all, it seems. But, if this be so, it still seems that not just anything happens due to the disorderly motion. Indeed, we shall see in a moment that it gives rise to the visible and touchable, fire and earth, which the Craftsman finds on the scene and does not introduce himself!}

In any case, the effect of the random, uncaused, chaotic change, which apparently manifests itself even after the soul orders things as best it can through its own motions, is contrary to the Good. If we assume that bringing things into order is part of the life of the soul, and that that requires something disordered to be brought into order, some \textit{resistance} to be overcome, some innate tendency to disorder, then, perhaps, there must be evil if there is to be such a good. If the resistance must be continuously present, else the living ceases to function, or live at all, then life is the overcoming of evil, the tendency to disorder, and evil must be present \textit{whenever} there is Good. Life is distinguished from mere motion, then, for it is orderly motion, maintained in matter that is intrinsically disorderly, and falls into disorderly motion immediately whenever life is removed from it.

What sort of order is imposed by the Craftsman? Mathematical order. This much Plato draws from the Pythagorean tradition, providing here a sympathetic re-reading of Philolaus, as it seems. The Good is identified with mathematical order, and so the intelligibility of the world hangs on its being mathematically Formed. In particular, Philolaus’s unlimited materials are re-interpreted by Plato as things characterizable through pairs of opposed qualities, and so, as Aristotle remarks, Plato differed from the Pythagoreans in making the unlimited a dyad.\footnote{\textit{Metaphysics} 987b23–27. This is the reading of Meinwald (2002). See also Huffey (2008).} The disorderly change in the un-Formed stuff seems to be due its shifting, opposed sensible qualities, which vary across the ranges of hot and cold, moist and dry, and the like, at random. It is not at all clear that the disorderly “motion” can be spatial, since space and time does not arise until things are brought under the ordering of geometrical concepts and observable, regular, cyclic motions, that is to say, numbered, measurable distances and times. But that seems to argue against there being any change \textit{at all}, so a space and time without measure might be envisioned in this disorderly change. But perhaps this difficulty can be finessed if we note that Plato does not think the universe ever really came into being, so the situation envisioned before it arose...
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may turn out to be a strictly impossible one, even though the discussion how this imaginary event occurred will enlighten us as to the actual structure of the world. It would follow, of course, that it is impossible that the universe should have been made, but that would not bother Plato, one assumes, just as it would not bother him in making a geometrical construction, if it turned out to be impossible that geometrical figures should ever have been made or come into being (as, indeed, it is).

Plato’s treatment of sensible qualities here are reminiscent of “qualia,” or “sense data,” the subjective objects of awareness supposed by some in the 20th century to be the immediate objects of consciousness. Just as Plato makes the directly sensible unintelligible, so these modern Platonists hold that no account in physicalist terms can be given of qualia, nor any explanation how they arise and pass away. They seem to accompany intelligible physical events, which are the objects of scientific investigation and understanding, and even our modern philosophers who admit that they are produced somehow by physical events, hold that there is no account to be found how such physical events gives rise to them, or why they happen to be connected to them. Plato thought them produced by a physical-mental interaction of some sort, which was presumably no more intelligible. These things are states of mind, appearances to minds, even if they are physical, and objects of mind as well. Several further points: (1) These appearances are not states of the intellect, but are there quite independently of the intellect, so that the senses (and imagination?) have to be considered an entirely distinct mental faculty from reason or understanding, even if their products are accessible to reason. (2) These appearances, if that is what they are, only come to be associated with a mind once they are ordered by the understanding, in accord with the Forms. (3) Soul seems to be possible only because these perceptions associated with the senses are intelligible, because they can be understood, and that is why an external world, an orderly Cosmos, is possible, and can be understood by the soul, as well. (4) If good things are not only to be understood, but to be encountered, it seems, the soul must have sensory powers, and that means it must be infected with a certain disorder, and perceive appearances unintelligibly as well as understanding the Forms.

Is Plato an Idealist, then, or a Mind-Body Dualist? He does postulate both mind and body, making them irreducible one to the other, but he also insists that neither can exist without the other. Perhaps it would be best to view him as monist of some sort, who takes the one sort of thing that is to have both mental and

Perhaps some part of the causal events in the world are hidden from us, those that have to do with the production of our own awareness of things? Or perhaps a more radical conclusion can be drawn, that there are no such causal events, and subjective awareness is simply inexplicable. Still, it seems to arise, and surely with causes! Something has gone seriously wrong in this line of reasoning, but no generally accepted account what that is has yet been developed.
intelligible aspects, and bodily, unintelligible aspects.

The first introduction of order into this disorderly chaos of sensible qualities, or immediate perceptions, depending on how one wants to look at them, would have to occur with the Craftsman’s making of the stuff that will serve as the raw material from which the world is made, one might well say, the Craftsman’s production of a dependable, orderly corporeal matter from it. This is produced from fire and earth (the objective aspect of visual and tactile appearances). No account is given where fire and earth came from, but one notices that they are descended conceptually from Parmenides’s Light and Night. What Plato says here is certainly puzzling. The two must be mixed or bound together to make up a world, and that can only occur through a proportion, and that a proportion between two cubes, since a three-dimensional world is intended. There is a pair of geometric means to be found between perfect cubes, on this pattern: $p^3/p^2q = p^2q/pq^2 = pq^2/q^3$. So there were two means set up between fire and earth, namely air and water. What does he mean? I think his intention is that the fire and earth are to be mixed together, as, perhaps, the ingredients for bread or custard, or concrete, are mixed together. Now only if the ingredients are mixed in the right proportions will the resulting mixture be of the proper consistency, with none of the ingredients in excess so that some portion of it separates out again as the mixture is baked or sets. If this happens when making bricks from a mixture clay of water, sand and straw, or pottery from a mixture of clay and water, the result is pottery or bricks that turn out badly when fired, and is given to crumbling afterward, and dough that is not properly mixed will not rise, or fail in some other way to achieve the right consistency when baked. Moreover, fire and earth don’t mix very well, and so the two intermediates, water and air, must be introduced. (Similarly, oil and lemon juice don’t mix well, but the introduction of egg yolk, which mixes reasonably well with both oil and lemon juice, will enable one to make mayonnaise nonetheless.) The air mixes pretty well with fire, the water with earth, and air and water sufficiently well with each other to bind the whole thing together. The proportion

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361 It is to be noted that immediate perception of these sensibles turns out to be possible only because these appearances are simultaneously the appearing object, fire, say, and the appearing of the object, the visual sensation. This identity of object and subject in the “intentional object” may appear absurd to us (or may not), but the same assumption, to explain how knowledge of the “external world” is possible, is to be found in Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Bertrand Russell, and many, many others. It is where we end up when we see serious problems in the “causal” theory of knowledge found, for instance, in the Atomists.

362 Moreover, Parmenides postulated Night and Light as what lay behind the two chief sorts of sensory impressions (for the natural theorist, at least), namely vision and touch (which might include hearing, which is the outcome of rapid repeated little blows within the ear, and even taste and smell, which do require contact). So fire and earth are natural causes of the things our basic senses are immediately aware of. There is, I think, some ambiguity whether the world is constructed by Plato from sense data, or from their physical analogues—but the answer is neither, of course, or both. There is also an interesting parallel (identity?) between ordering the physical, and coming to understand the sense data under the concepts provided by the Forms.
then, is a proportion of the mass or volume of the elements. The observed universe suggests that most of what is is fire, and the least earth. One might wonder why Plato does not assign equal amounts of each of the elements, as Empedocles had. But since Empedocles’s time astronomers had re-evaluated their conception of the size of the universe, and the Sun had grown in their imaginations from a rather small object, to something perhaps the size of the Peloponnesus (a region of Greece), to something considerably larger than the whole Earth. The distances pictured between heavenly objects had grown similarly, and it seemed obvious now that there was much more fire than earth in the world as a whole. As for what the actual numbers of the proportions are, Plato later speaks of 1:2:4:8, and 1:3:9:27, in his discussion of other aspects of the structure of the world, but does not specify here. Presumably the proportion of fire and earth is given, and both fire and earth are cubes, since they are three-dimensional solids. Whatever the numbers, these are the proportions needed to make the world adhere together as one thing, and to adhere together permanently, without separating like badly made mayonnaise, or cracking like bad bricks.

This raises an unanswerable question or two. First, where does air and water come from? Is it somehow fashioned out of fire and earth? Or is it created ex nihilo? If we insist on taking the production of the two here literally, probably best would be to say that fire and earth come in two forms, the original disorderly stuff, say fire* and earth*, and then the ordered stuff we find in the natural world. This ordered fire and earth is what is associated with the two intermediates, so air and water are found only in the ordered form, and are a result of bringing fire* and earth* into proper, orderly, mixture with one another, converting them into fire and earth. One might also ask how the Craftsmen does this ordering. Does he create the needed air and water in sufficient quantities to make up the proportion? Was the proportion of the original pair of cubical numbers already present before these intermediaries were introduced? If so, it would not seem that things were entirely disorderly! If we reject that picture, though, it is hard to think of anything to replace it with. So, one supposes we just don’t know. As the start of a scientific explanation to be developed through further reflection and research, this is not promising. But we ought not regard it as the start of a scientific explanation. We have seen

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\text{If one takes it that fire is hydrogen, the lightest of the elements, constituting the stars, and earth the heavier elements we find around us on Earth, we will find scientists nowadays agreeing that there is much more hydrogen than earth in the universe, and that on very similar grounds.}
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\text{Modern scientists also provide an explanation of the distribution of the elements, asserting (with a great deal of evidence supporting them) that at an early phase the world was composed of much simpler, more chaotic stuff at a far higher density and temperature than it is now, and that the present state of things, the elements currently making up things, arose from simpler ones as the universe expanded and average energy densities in it declined.}
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that Plato intends it only as an expository convenience, and so he does not have to answer such questions.\textsuperscript{365}

The world always was, and all this talk about how it might have been made is nothing more than a way of talking about what conditions must be met for it to be an orderly world. There is not, and never was, fire\* and earth\*, but only fire and earth. The former only represent the chaotic aspects of the latter.

In any case, Plato’s story involves a merely picturesque correspondence between geometry and physics, and does not get at all at the underlying causal structures explaining why those proportions of fire, air, water and earth are needed if they are to hang together to make up a world. Moreover the “Platonic Theorem,” as it came to be called, that a continuing proportion will be single between any two squares, but double between two cubes, seems relevant to the issue only metaphorically. But assuming that fire and earth are to be mixed, with the aim of making the earth more easily shaped, more plastic, and the fire more cohesive, the proposal that a liquid and a less violently active gas might serve as binders is a natural one for any craftsman used to working with mixtures, and the right recipe for the mixture would no doubt specify certain proportions of the ingredients.\textsuperscript{366}

Plato supposes there is but one material universe, and that this single united world uses up all the material moving with disorderly motion that is there for the Craftsman to shape. One might suppose this is because of the choice of the Craftsman, though if so, the Craftsman is choosing what is best in choosing this. But to pursue questions like how it is that the Craftsman knows of this disordered matter, and whether some of it might escape his attention, is no doubt to talk nonsense. We aren’t supposed to take the story seriously in that way. Rather, we might observe that existence is simply a matter of entering into causal relations, however remote, with the perceivers of existence,\textsuperscript{367} and so matter unperceived by Craftsman, and therefore by any of the souls made by the craftsman, is not relevant here at all. To exist, for this stuff involved in chaotic Heraclitean change, is simply to be known, and so it must fall under the ordering of the soul even if it is chaotic in its underlying nature.

\textsuperscript{365}In the same spirit, we might hold that the story of Santa Claus is intended to make certain points, though I’m not sure what they would be—perhaps the same as Plato’s point, everything always works out for the good. In any case, the story is intended only as an (entertaining) expository device, and so it is just impertinent for a child to ignore those points by focusing on the impossibility of visiting perhaps a billion homes in a single night, some of which don’t even have chimneys. Or perhaps I am too hard on the child and that is just part of the entertainment. Children do love absurd stories.

\textsuperscript{366}Timaeus 31-32. For all this and the rest of the details of Plato’s mathematical physics, Cornford (1937) provides a rich treatment. He cites, often verbatim, the ancient commentaries (especially Proclus) and scientific works, as well as 19th and 20th century scholarly work relevant to understanding the dialogue, in particular, Heath (1908), (1921). Here, Cornford (1937) 45-51.

\textsuperscript{367}As Plato noted in the discussion of the Battle of the Giants and the Gods in the Sophist.
But whatever the rationale here, Plato is clear that all the available material is used up by the Craftsman, and all of it enters into relation with a single soul that provides it with a unified intelligence. “Since the god wanted nothing more than to make the world like the best of the intelligible things, complete in every way, he made it a single visible living thing, which contains within itself all the living things whose nature it is to share its kind.” Since the universe is modeled on the Good, there is only one universe, just as there is only one Form. Everything that falls under the one Form of the Good has participants in it found in the one universe as parts of it. Thus the spatial relationship of containment echoes the relationship of participation. Moreover, the universe is everlasting once it has come to be, for there is nothing outside it that could break it up. Why it might not come apart of itself, given the continued presence of the disorderly motion, is not a question Plato raises or answers, except that, of course, he thinks that the fire and earth can be mixed in such a way as to become indissoluble. Otherwise the world would not be indestructible, and would fall short of the degree of imitation of the Good Plato desires for it. Perhaps it would already, by now, have been destroyed if it could be, and if it dissolves into disorder periodically, as the Stoics maintained the world dissolves into fire, well, the means for restoring order must remain present, and so the soul, at least, must be unaffected. Periodic near-chaos is not to be ruled out, probably, at least in the lower regions of the world.

As for the shape of this finite world, it must be a sphere as Parmenides had said. The reason given here is that it is fitting that, just as the Living Creature that is the world embraces all other living creatures within it, so the world should be spherical, since the sphere embraces all the geometrical figures in it. Exactly why it should be said to do that is not made clear, but perhaps the reason is that the sphere has the greatest volume given its surface area of any figure, or that it can be circumscribed about any of the five regular solids. Or

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368 Timaeus 30a-c.
369 Timaeus 30d-31a.

Thus the multiple worlds of the Atomists and other earlier natural philosophers are rejected by Plato. The world arises as a kind of animal in the Atomists’s view, through a chance confluence of appropriate atoms of a sort that happens accidentally all the time in infinitely extended space. Plato takes it that the animal cannot arise by chance, but must come about from another animal, in conformity with the Good. The good, in the temporal causal realm, can only express itself as a living thing. Throughout, he thinks what is cannot be infinite, but must be definite in whatever quantity is its measure. All of this, of course, pursues the vision of Parmenides.

371 Timaeus 31ab.
372 Timaeus 33b
more to the point, Plato wants to make the world as unchanging as he can, and circular movement is his best shot at this, and a rotating sphere changes less through its movement than, say, a rotating cube, since it always remains in the same orientation. In any case, the world is and always was a perfect sphere, indestructible from without, nourished from its own waste. All this seems to follow Xenophanes and Parmenides, rather than the early Pythagorean cosmology in which the fiery One breathes in the darkness around it. The Craftsman then places soul in the world, extending as far as it does in all directions, and it is explained that the material side of the world and the soul are coeval, neither being made before the other. Both always exist, the one in the other.

So how does the Craftsman make the soul of the world? First, he makes a mixture of being, of the same, and of difference, each of these being between the indivisible that always is, the Form, and the divisible that comes to be, that is, the participants in the Form. So the existence of the soul is between the eternal existence of Forms, and the becoming of things participating in it. The Sameness of the soul is likewise between the Sameness of the Forms and the sameness of their participants. And the Difference of the Soul, from other souls, apparently, is a blend of the Difference between Forms, and the difference between their participants. The notion here seems to be that a physical participant in a Form has an existence stretching through time, without anything truly identical with itself persisting from one moment to the next. One physical object differs from another, it seems, inasmuch as it is a different series of momentary beings. A Form is Identical to itself, non-identical to other forms, this identity and non-identity being the absolute identity and non-identity that belongs to eternal and unchanging objects with essential properties defining them. The Soul, then, is like the Forms inasmuch as it is strictly identical to itself, even as it occurs at different times, and so is what provides the identity and unity of those things participating in the Forms. The Soul is something, so that it has an essential nature that it never loses, just as the Form of Piety is always Pious, that is, is identical to Piety, is Pious essentially, and not accidentally or by participation. But the soul is also spread out through time, and has properties by becoming as material participants in the Forms do. So it might know something at one time, and not at another. It is a blend of the Heracleitean appearance, and the Forms, and it is immortal, of course, due to its kinship to the Forms. The only way in which identity occurs in sensibles over time, so that we have the same dog in the bedroom that we had a week ago, is by the presence of a soul, with an unchanging essence, that is the key to the identification of the dog. It is necessarily a dog, if it is to exist at all, and it remains one and the same dog over a period of time because it has the same dog soul. Its accidental properties at a given time are not part of what it really is, but being a mammal, four-legged, sensitive, and so on, all are part of what
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it really is, and it does not cease to be any of these things as long as it exists at all. But there is a different dog
in our neighbor’s bedroom. This dog is not different because it has different essential properties, of course,
but because it has a different soul, one not identical to the soul of the dog in our bedroom. So a soul is rather
like a Form, but a Form which occurs in time and so is subject to accidental change, and a Form which is in a
body, and so is distinct from other Forms with precisely the same essence. The Heraclitean flux is joined to
the Forms by the soul, which is intermediate between them. This view is a sophisticated development from
the suggestion in the Symposium that Love is a Daimon, neither a God nor a mortal, but something between
them, that joins their two worlds.

But we need to remind ourselves that these two worlds never have existed apart from one another,
according to Plato, and indeed, Plato probably did not think they could. Particular sensibles must participate
in the Forms, and so be ensouled, if they are to have any being at all, if they are to be things identifiable by their
unchanging essences. And Forms must have participants if they are to exist in the sense that they causally
interact with other things. However Forms participate in one another, or are otherwise related to one another
through their exemplary being, they do not affect one another. There is no causation between Forms because
there is no change in Forms. So if Forms are to share in actuality, as something that is possible and then comes
to be through causal processes, some of them must share their essence with a soul, and the others share in
actuality only through their relations to the accidental properties occurring in those souls. It should be noted
here that Plato does not seem to think that a soul can exist disembodied.

There is a connection here between the construction of the soul and the old view that we know
through recollection of the Forms, and that our soul is immortal, due to this connection to the Forms. The
doctrine of recollection drops out of sight with the Republic, and nothing clearly replaces it in its function of
providing an explanation how we come to know the Forms. I have suggested that the knowledge of the Forms
arises in the Republic and after from the pursuit of dialectic, and does not involve any direct perception of the
Forms after the manner related in the Phaedrus. Here the Forms are actually constituents of the soul, and so its
familiarity with the Forms, its ability to be reminded of them, stems from its own nature. It may not be that
an actual awareness of itself is necessary for the soul to be reminded of them, so that a new account of our
direct perception of the Forms is provided, for they shape the soul’s thinking processes and its awareness of
sensibles without needing to be viewed by the soul to do so. They are part of the soul’s very fabric. So the soul
might be said to know them even if there is no direct perception of them. To know the Form of Difference is
to know how to distinguish, to be reminded of the Different, to know the Form of the Same is to know how
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identify a thing the second time, to be reminded of the Same. To Know the Forms is to be able to do dialectic.

So the doctrine of recollection is transmuted into a kind of innatism, “the truth of things that are (ta onta) is in our soul.

To return to the story of the Craftsman, he makes these three intermediate mixtures, which appear to be like matter, inasmuch as they have three-dimensionality and spatial location, no doubt inherited from the Heraclitean side. So he has a certain quantity of this soul stuff, which he splits up into parts in various proportions, each of which is a mixture of these six. He then forms each part into a sphere, nests them, imparts different motions to them, while the motion of the outer sphere belongs to all. Thus a single whole, composed of smaller wholes, and a model of the heavens, is produced. Just as the state is modeled on the soul, with similar parts and structure, so the heavens are modeled on it too. But we are now looking at the soul from a different angle, as it were, and noting its spatial structure, whereas the Republic examined the soul as life, as something knowing, desiring and acting. It is as if we lived as microbial beings inside a gigantic brain, constructed just like our own brain. By studying our world, we could begin to understand how our brain works, and so our own consciousness. The world is an animal, and the fundamental science will turn out to be, not physics, but biology, under which falls psyche-ology, the study of the soul.

The middle position of the soul, when it enters into animals below the heavens, also means that it has an irrational as well as a rational part, sensation as well as knowledge, and an active part too, that affects other things in the temporal world. The spheres of the human soul are not concentric—reason is in the head, closely associated with the senses there, the active part is in the chest, and the lower part that handles sensory desires, in the abdomen, each of them spherical and with its own spherical revolution. Their not being concentric suggests, perhaps, that reason, the active part, and sensory desires each has its own sense of self, its own goals, its own views of things. Only the rational part is immortal, because only it is made by the Craftsman, and the other parts, being made by souls the Craftsman has made, are subject to coming apart again. Putting it in more literal terms, the soul of the universe is a permanent, necessary feature of reality, but the imitation of this soul in human beings, animals and plants, is something that is caused, patched together, and so can cease and come apart again.

The rational part of the human soul is also constructed by the Craftsman, and Plato must intend that this too is a permanent, necessary feature of reality. Hence the rational part of the soul is immortal. The lower

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parts of the human soul are made by the souls of the heavenly bodies, that is, they arise from natural processes, and they are subject to dissolution. There is also sexual and reproductive imagery here. Reason, like the male semen, informs the “nurse” or “receptacle,” which plays the female, and the production of the world is paralleled by sexual generation. So the soul, since it is designed to inhere in and control a body, has an irrational part, and is subject to the disorderly motion as well as the orderly one.

The permanent soul of the universe, constructed by the Craftsman, is composed from a number of spheres, all revolving perfectly within themselves, with a common center. Thus there is a good deal more unity in this soul than in ours. The motions form a kind of life, and enable, in the end, interaction between the soul and matter. Having different diameters, these motions or spheres differ from one another. One circle in particular, that of the Sun, is dominated by the motion of the Same (the self-identical Forms). This is the nous, which looks to the Forms, and it moves always at a uniform speed. The other circles deviate from this perfection, and share in the motion of the Different. They do so by speeding up and slowing down periodically, though the overall pattern of their motions is regular, so that they harmonize with the Same. That is, the motion of the Same and the Different here brings the two circles around to the same place at the same time after a definite number of revolutions of each, so that in the end, the whole motion remains cyclical. The diurnal motion is the motion of the Same, and the motions of the planets and the Moon are the motions of the Different here. The “Great Year” is the period of time it takes for all the spheres to return to the same place, and defines the whole of the motion of the soul, including all its internal variation. (Note that Plato does not use epicycles, like later astronomers, but assumes that each planet moves in a perfect circle. It is just that its velocity varies over time.) Thus the circles all fit together into a single soul due to the harmonization of their motions, and the fact that all the circles are concentric, but some of them move in accord with the different.

When souls are produced on the model of the Heavens, the soul of the whole world, for individual parts of it below the moon (animals and plants), they become subject to various linear motions from place to place, no longer remaining always within themselves, and this is a further irregularity, which they can adapt to and understand because of their internal realization of the Different.

There are two ways in which this adaptation to their material environments and their bodies occur. In one, they become aware through the senses of things they come into contact with, their bodies and the alterations produced in their sensory organs by external objects. They detect what is like them where they are, and since there are a number of different pieces of the soul, they can perceive a variegated environment, all the sensible qualities that enter into the formation of images. They can also note the resemblance of the images
to the Same, since the intellect is aware of the motions of the lower parts, and so they can recognize how things are the Same as the various Forms and Different from them. (It won’t do to press for details here. Plato is satisfied to give an impressionistic feel for the mechanism involved, and would no doubt note that this is only “something like the truth” anyway.) On the other hand, they can transfer motions to the body, various sorts of motions, since there are a number of circles with different speeds there. Perhaps the inner planets, Mercury and Venus, represent the senses, or more specifically, the consumptive (commercial) and sexual desires, and the outer planets, the Moon, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, other tendencies to motion, reason, the Sun, of course, binding this all together through its common diurnal motion shared by all the planets. The Moon, being closest in, no doubt has a special relation to the body, and perhaps represents the bodily desires, while Mars, Jupiter and Saturn might suitably represent the part that loves honor in various of its aspects, perhaps warlike, ruling, and desiring of wealth.

How does Plato imagine that the soul knows the Forms? He does not say, but surely the Pythagorean doctrines concerning music must be the key to the matter. The soul of the world produces a sound, a harmony, the harmony of the spheres, and the most fundamental forms, the Form of the Same and the Different, are mixed in the material composing the soul. So he must imagine that there is a kind of sympathetic vibration (something the Greeks were quite familiar with) by which the parts of the soul vibrated in tune with Forms themselves. The Forms would then very much be thought of as numbers, the numbers that mark their defining frequencies (which would be many frequencies harmonizing with one another in the any given Form, like that of Rabbit, one assumes), and we find here a motivation for the various doctrines of Plato’s early followers, and perhaps Plato himself, that construct the Forms from numbers, or the One and the Many. The vibrations are defined by their frequencies (and strength?) which is defined numerically. Or perhaps it is that physical things, of which soul is the most sensitive and refined, display this vibration in tune with one another, and so souls can enter into a state in which they understand some Form through their sympathetic vibration with things that have that Form. Participation in a Form might be a matter of vibration at the requisite frequencies, as well, so that a soul would have a strongest, self-defining vibration that maintains itself inasmuch as it is attuned to a given Form (it is a wolf-soul, or a rational soul), and then secondary, fleeting vibrations, in response to things it encounters. Souls are akin to the Forms, then, in that they share these complex vibrations, and akin to material and sensible things inasmuch as these vibrations in them are physically realized, and so can cause and response to vibrations in other souls, and so recognize the vibrations in another soul, say the soul of a rabbit, so that it knows it is a rabbit.
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This would also explain how it is that souls can shape the matter in which they dwell. Their defining vibrations will be communicable to this matter, and they may be especially attuned to pick up the vibrations of their own bodies. Everything we know, then, we know by experience of ourselves, or in any case, through becoming like the thing known. It is, of course, rather hard to see how to cash in further details, but this is certainly an inspiring start, and provides a physical model for thought and perception (the perceptual organ sensitive especially to certain vibrations communicating these to the common sense, and that to the rational soul), and an explanation of both knowledge of the Forms and a Form’s ability to sense and control a body. For those who like such things, it perhaps even provides an anticipation of modern physical theory, the equation of waves and particles in quantum mechanics, the solar system like construction of the atom, the electromagnetic of light and all the other forms of electromagnetic waves, and so on.

Plato presumably thought this view of the soul correct in his Middle Dialogues. It is advanced by the supposed Pythagoreans Simmias and Cebes in the Phaedo, when they suggest that the soul may be an attunement. This is rejected by Socrates there, of course, but why? Because the attunement depends on how the thing attuned is arranged, as in a lyre, while the soul is responsible for active motion and material things are arranged by it. But a very strong sound will elicit sympathetic vibration in another thing. So the soul might be something with a very strong vibration which attunes the body so that it is alive. That meets the force of the objection. Notice that a string plucked on the lyre tends to continue to vibrate a pretty long time, and the finer the material used to make the string (metal instead of gut, for instance), the longer the vibration lasts. It seems to fade only due to damping, that is, loss of energy from the vibration in the production of sound waves, heat due to friction, irregularities in the string that keep it from remaining perfectly in tune, and so on. If there were no such irregularities, and no surrounding air to rob the vibration of its force, then the string, once struck, might ring indefinitely.

I am suggesting a physicalist reading of Plato’s account of the soul here. Perhaps a Form is some pattern of mathematical vibrations, which, when realized in matter, makes the matter behave in a certain way, say, like a rabbit. That pattern of mathematical vibrations is what it is, and considered as such, it is eternal and unchanging, but it only gets into the world and has an existing participant if something actually vibrates that way. It requires matter. Perhaps matter always has an unruly aspect inasmuch as its vibrations are damped by its interactions with surrounding matter. That need not be true of the world soul, though, for there is nothing surrounding it to damp its vibrations. (The basic idea here goes all the way back to Xenophanes.) Its vibrations are much stronger than those of any object contained within it, and it is not hard to imagine that, once struck,
it would continue to ring indefinitely, imparting its vibrations to its parts, right down to the most impure parts in the center, and, in the end, regaining everything it lost, as the energy of the vibration moved back out to the periphery again. If we insist that the soul is strictly immaterial, like the Forms, to ensure its immortality, then the physical side of the theory is lost, of course. All the talk of the music of the spheres, the attunement of one soul to another or to the Forms, becomes mere metaphor. The explanation of the soul’s knowledge and sensation, and its action on the body, is thereby lost, for the theory of sympathetic vibration and attunement that underlies it is fundamentally a physical theory. But Plato is a physicalist, whatever later Platonists may have been.

One has to wonder why this is not all said more explicitly somewhere, in Plato or in Pythagorean sources. Is the famous Pythagorean secretiveness involved? Why be satisfied to hint at this, to use it in metaphors, without coming clean on the physicalist elements? The answer may be precisely Socrates’s refutation of Simmias and Cebes in the *Phaedo*. The human soul, after all, is not the God, with no environment to sap its energy. All too clearly, its vibrations are gradually damped over time, particularly given the difficulty with which it controls the impure matter making up its body. So Plato in the *Timaeus* has to tell us that the human soul is only immortal in its rational part, and that part must return periodically to the star which is its patron spirit to be replenished, so that it can once more take on a human life afterwards. The immortality of the individual human soul is difficult to accept given this doctrine, and perhaps the Pythagoreans did not wish to expose this weakness of their doctrine to the uncommitted and the uninitiated. If that is right, then the problem with making Averroist thought too public in the 13th century were felt first among the Pythagoreans themselves. The unenlightened, still selfishly clinging to his individual bodily existence, cannot be satisfied with the knowledge that the Forms themselves, and the rational part of the soul modeled on the Forms, enjoy immortality, but not the individual human being, and it is best not to be too clear about that.

Time is introduced by the Craftsman with the regular movements of the heavenly bodies that measure it.\(^{374}\) That means it depends on the existence of the soul of the world for its being, and suggests that time is not so much a feature of reality as a feature of the soul’s perception of it. Given that souls must have the structure of circular motions we have described, it also means that a soul cannot exist without being subject to time—life involves change, but orderly change, and therefore it takes place as a process in time. A vibration has a period and a frequency. There is no time associated with the disorderly motion, for there can be no cycles there by

\(^{374}\textit{Timaeus} \text{ 37c–38c.}\)
which time could be measured. But there is some question what it is that is introduced with time, for change of a random sort seemingly occurs in the chaotic conditions before the Craftsman takes action, and just as geometrical Forms must be introduced so that things in space have measure, so the motions of the heavenly bodies, the cycles set up in the soul of the world, establish a measure for time. Perhaps time is present before the Craftsman does his work in the same way that space is, then. It is present in a chaotic fashion beforehand, but becomes time when it comes under measure, just as things are apparently extended beforehand, but only come to be measured when made to imitate geometric shapes. But this is no doubt pushing the story too hard, given that Plato does not really intend us to think that the Craftsman actually did these things at some time before the universe existed. Indeed, one more difficulty with taking the Craftsman story literally (if we don’t have enough already) is that it suggests events happening at a time before there was any time.

Plato speaks of time as an everlasting likeness of eternity, moving according to number. The word for eternity, aion, can also mean a lifetime, and so we might suggest that eternity is the life or being of the eternal Forms. He says that, strictly speaking, we should not say of something of the past that it is past, but rather, it seems, that it was—the point seems to be that it is not now anything at all, and being past is not a characteristic currently belonging to something that exists now. So strictly speaking, only of that which always was and always will be can we say truly that it is, without specifying when it is, and so say that it is, without qualification. This suggests that what is subject to change in time has a different sort of life from the eternal, a life involving a now, past and future, in which only what is now is present to the living thing as its life, and this keeps changing. One might say that the whole course of its life is possessed in a single act of attention by the eternal, so that the now of the eternal embraces all times, while the now of the Cosmos, of which it is immediately aware, embraces only the present moment. At least, that is what is said by Plotinus, in his interpretation of Plato, and we shall spend some time with the idea of the “strictly eternal” as opposed to the “everlasting temporal,” given its importance in Christian thought. But the identification of time and eternity with the life of what is temporal or eternal, and the connection of time and eternity as essentially connected to what the

575Perhaps his meaning is that what is past may be, but only for the present instant, and its past or future being does not contribute to its being (now) while that which is eternal always is, and its now is stretched over its whole life, simultaneously present to it. So nothing, it seems, manages to be for even the shortest period of time, unless it is eternal. What was and will be, are only for the present instant, and never really exist for any period of time. This may also be the point of the parallel remark of Parmenides, that “not ever was it, nor yet will it be, since it is now together entire, single, continuous,” from Fragment 8, though it seems rather too adventurous to build that much around it, and I avoided that in my treatment of Parmenides in Chapter 2. In any case, it seems that Plato read Parmenides in that way, and since he presumably had all of Parmenides’s poem before him, perhaps we should, too, except we must remember that Plato does not mind reading a great deal into his predecessors, too develop and make clear their fundamental ideas, so I still incline to caution.
living thing is immediately aware of in its present, are not made explicit in the *Timaeus*. Moreover, Plato never says anything that suggests he thinks we should take it that the Forms, in themselves, make up something living or a mind, unless the Craftsman be taken to be this strictly eternal living thing. But the Craftsman appears to act like a soul in time in making the soul, as we have observed already. So this subjective account of time and eternity seems to be part and parcel with the metaphysics of those later Platonists who assign consciousness and life to the Forms themselves, but not a doctrine of Plato himself. What Plato does make explicit is that ‘is’ alone is correctly said of what always is, not ‘was’ and ‘shall be,’ and moreover what is always unchanging does not become older or younger. This last point seems to suggest that its age cannot be measured by a number that increases as it gets older. All that Plato seems absolutely committed to here is that what strictly is is necessarily, and that is different from the *is of becoming*, which is not necessary and so arises due to temporal causation, and of itself involves no implicit reference to a past or future.

How is it that time is an image of eternity? If the cosmos is to be ordered by number, it is required that changes occur according to ratios in some way, which means, in the end, that change must be cyclic, completing one cycle with each “great year,” the period of time it takes for all the heavenly bodies to come back to their starting points at the same moment. The circular motions in the heavens, however complex, might seem to guarantee an eventual return to the same state, and so change is brought within bounds. The living soul changes, but goes through the same cycle of changes in an indefinite repetition. Indeed, if we suppose that everything in the world is the same at any given point in the cycle whenever that point is reached, it would seem impossible to distinguish a moment in one cycle from its corresponding moment in another. Change is thereby limited and brought into order in time, and changing things come to imitate the Forms in their eternal freedom from change as closely as changing things can imitate such a thing.

One can say more, though, and perhaps prepare the way for Plotinus’s later discussion of eternity and time. The lifetime of a being seems to indicate the period of time over which there is something existing identical to that being. So at any two times in its lifetime identically the same being is. Now since Forms cannot change, their identity is never threatened, as it were, by their changing. They are necessarily self-identical at all times (and identical with their selves at all other times). This is an especially important point to Plato, for

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376 Plato does not show any signs of suspecting this, but actually it does not guarantee an eventual return to the same state of affairs, if the periods of revolution of any pair of the circular movements involved turn out not to be in any proportion to one another. This can happen if the periods of one revolution is, say, the square root of two, or pi, times the period of another. Assuming that they are all in whole number ratios to one another, there will be a great year.
it is this which makes it possible to make a secure reference to a Form. At any time one can speak of what is Justice, say, and one is always referring to identically the same thing. There is only one thing to refer to or define. That is part of the reason why Forms make good paradigms in which other things can participate. Sensibles, on the other hand, subject as they are to change, have no innate tendency, as it were, to self-identity over time. They only share in this identity from the presence of souls in them, which are like Forms in being self-identical over (all of time) but somehow also subject to change, having a future different from their present or past. So in making soul, which makes possible the participation of sensibles in the Forms, the Craftsman makes “a moving image of eternity,” sharing in the perfect identity characteristic of the eternal, but still subject to change.

Clearly, the understanding of time and becoming is central to Plato’s metaphysics, but this is as much as Plato ever tells us about the matter (maybe a little more than he tells us), so we should move on.

Despite the picture we have just presented of Plato’s views, we should not suppose that he thought the physical world could be deduced from the Form of the Good alone, as the only possible realization of it in actuality. One does not deduce the mathematical hypotheses from the Good, and they are not teleological of themselves. Rather, one sees that they are consistent with teleology, and give us a purchase and a footing, enabling us to develop a teleological view of the world in detail, by showing how the Good (that is, life and cognition) can be realized in particulars in space and time. What would count as a realization of the Good in actuality can only be settled if we have something more than the Idea of the Good to work with. For this reason, in the Timaeus and Philebus, Plato insists that the realm of Forms stands over against a receptacle located in space, and it is only by understanding that the Forms are to be realized in the receptacle that we can give meaning to the notion of their being realized at all. Matter is not created by the Good. Although Good is the highest genus, how to derive its lower species is not settled by the idea of the Good itself, rather, we must supplement it with the geometric hypotheses to fit the Good into space and time, so that its very lowest species turn out to be mathematical. Mathematical Forms make matter subject to order, and so makes the realization of the good in it possible.\footnote{For this paragraph, see especially Mueller (1992).}

And so, within the world, Plato speaks of the works of reason, produced with the Good in mind, and the works of necessity, forced on reason as the preconditions of its labor. In one way, the works of necessity enter into the picture of the soul’s manufacture, when the Craftsman instructs the heavenly souls he has created.
to construct the souls of mortal beings to live on the Earth. Each star-soul is put in charge of a single such mortal soul, which can be reborn as a human being or animal, or, if it achieves a high level of goodness, will come to live for a time on the star which is its patron and maker as a reward. The rational parts of these human souls are constructed by the Craftsman from impure ingredients left over from the making of the heavenly souls. Then from even more impure ingredients a mixture is made and handed over to the heavenly souls, who fashion the material as best they can into the other parts of the human soul, and then bind the whole together. The various levels of purity are interesting, for they suggest that the stuff with which the Craftsman is supposed to work is of different sorts, to be classified as purer when it is more easily modeled on the Forms, and less pure when it is made to conform to them with more difficulty.

In the *Timaeus* Plato postulates at least three intermediaries between the Form of the Good and the material world. The soul of the universe, behind which lies the Craftsman, we have noted. The Craftsman realizes the Good in another, and so looks to the Good, but Plato takes no interest in how it itself is Good except to note that it must will the Good. To take such an interest would be to say things that could be given no meaning, given how he wants us to interpret his account of “the beginnings” of the world. The soul of the world, and all the souls within it of the heavenly bodies, also look to the Good and realize it in another, inasmuch as they construct the non-rational portions of the souls that take charge of material, sensible bodies, and they also partake themselves of the Good. Sensible bodies do not have any creative power, and are not cognizant of the Good, but they do partake of it, inasmuch as they are shaped or formed by souls. But if they are to be shaped, they must be capable of taking on shape, they must be measurable, spatially, and so subject to mathematical forms beforehand. Nonetheless, mathematical Forms are not sensible things, and so the mathematical Forms must be placed in the receptacle, which thereby is shaped into such things, by the Craftsman, the souls being capable of working only within nature, with what is already formed in some way. The geometrical Forms make the receptacle or womb which receives their images capable of receiving the image of the good, by making it measurable and so subject to order. So, there must be something whose entire nature is its availability for the reception of impressions. This thing must be “devoid of any inherent characteristics of its own.” He imagines something like a plastic substance that can be molded into any shape, or a surface that can take on any color. But in these cases, of course, we can give an account in terms of the

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378 *Timaeus* 50c.

379 *Timaeus* 51a.
specific nature of the receptacle in question why it is that it can receive the Forms, shapes or colors, it does. What Plato imagines in the receptacle is something that is purely “becoming” and in no way is, purely potential. It seems it is whatever grounds the fact that sensible things imitating the Forms can come to be in space, for he speaks of it as something that existed before the universe came to be.\textsuperscript{380} It seems best to say that this thing is placed in space, as it were, it is laid on a grid on which it can be measured. He seems to imagine that in becoming, what becomes first of all takes on a location in space, and that makes it possible for it to take on a shape and whatever other Forms it might imitate.\textsuperscript{381}

In particular, “what becomes” is not space. That is a third thing other than becoming (accidental being) and being (the necessary being of the Forms). Space “exists always and cannot be destroyed” and “provides a location for all things that come to be.”\textsuperscript{382} Plato finds it a problem how it might be understood to be. It is not an object of sense perception, nor is it an object of reasoning, as the Forms are, which have definable being, so that we can speak and think of them. It is apprehended “by a kind of bastard reasoning that does not involve sense perception, and it is hardly an object of belief [that is, of the senses].”\textsuperscript{383} So the receptacle is the particular existing natural thing, the bare particularity which imitates the Forms and is sensed, that is, is the subject of causal activity and change. For sensible things, to exist is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be a particular.\textsuperscript{384}

Plato presents an account of the elements making up the world, fire, air, water and earth, in geometrical terms. He postulates that each of the elements consists of particles in the shape of a regular solid, pyramids (tetrahedra) in the case of fire, octahedra for air, icosahedra for water, and cubes for earth. These figures are composed of atomic triangles of two sorts, a bisected equilateral and isosceles right-angled. The faces of the figures composing fire, air and water are composed of six such equilateral triangles joined at their edges, with a single, it appears unifying, common vertex, and these figures can come apart and their elements be reconfigured, so that, for instance, from two fire particles an air particle may be constructed, and from five

\textsuperscript{380} Timaeus 52d.

\textsuperscript{381} If we think of a mirror image, perhaps we could say the mirror is perfectly a mirror if it has no color or brightness of its own, taking this moment by moment from what is reflected in it. But it still has a spatial structure parallel to the spatial structure of what is reflected, else it could not reflect an image at all.

\textsuperscript{382} Timaeus 52b.

\textsuperscript{383} Ibid. Perhaps the “bastard reasoning” is reasoning concerning images, as in the proofs of geometrical theorems.

\textsuperscript{384} Ibid.
fire particles a particle of water may be constructed. Earth cannot be constructed from the parts of any other elements, since its faces are constructed from four right-angled isosceles triangles apiece, though earth with larger faces composed, say, of sixteen triangles, or more, can occur. The idea here seems to be to account for different sorts of earth (and of fire and the other elements) with different densities. The mass apparently depends on the number of triangles, and so one molecule of Earth$_{16}$, if reconfigured to Earth$_4$, would yield four molecules, which would be maximally compressible to only half the volume that maximum compression of Earth$_{16}$ would give. Theses figures could be indefinitely large, it seems, giving an indefinite number of ever larger isotopes of a given element. Clearly, with the right suppositions, the system would allow for considerable elaboration to match observed facts, and might yield an empirical chemistry/physics, but as a matter of fact it was never pursued in this way, by Plato or anyone else. The proposal, like that of Democritus, was ventured as a suggestion how it might go, and the notion that we might undertake to determine what the details actually are was never taken seriously. Plato was happy to show how, in principle, a geometrical ordering of the world might account for phenomena. He suggested such an account, or the beginnings of one, but it has nothing other than its simplicity (?) and elegance to recommend it. This is the sort of thing the Craftsman might have tried on. To be generous, we might point out that our modern analogue of such a theory, our theories of chemistry and atomic structure, building things up from protons, electrons and neutrons (which seem to be points, i.e. singularities in fields, so at least quasi-mathematical constructions), only achieved its current theoretical adequacy to the observations by our backing into it, as it were, first working out the molecular level of structure, postulating atoms as having an indefinite number of kinds constructed no one knew how, and then, once our grasp of atoms was good enough, coming up with an account how they were put together from more elementary particles. As Aristotle points out in the *Physics*, to make progress, we have to work from larger, vaguely conceived wholes, to an analysis of their elements, explaining some features of those wholes, and then start over with an analysis of those elements, taking them as wholes. This, in effect, allows us to explain a relatively small number of facts at one level, leaving open how the explanations of other facts are going to work at the next level. We never have to explain everything all at once, which, of course, no one is clever enough to do. In any case, Plato only wanted to show the thing possible, to remove objections to what he argued for one more a priori grounds, the geometrical organization of the natural world in accordance with the Form of the Good. Roughly speaking, he was not interested in science, but only in showing that science is possible, that is, the world is ordered, because that contributed to showing that there is a God.
Plato continues to develop details, explaining the things his predecessors had undertaken to explain, dealing with the sorts of earth, water (metals, since they do melt, are sorts of water, gold being an especially pure kind), air and fire, how they mix and separate, and convert one into another, and how animal bodies are formed from tissues by the work of the soul, distinguishing the souls of plants, which lack both spirit and the senses, and reason, and the souls of animals, which lack reason, from the human soul.\textsuperscript{385} The apparently inanimate parts of the world are in fact the less orderly parts of the world itself, which is, of course, an animal with a soul. Processes such as are revealed in the weather are the life processes of the cosmos. The culmination of scientific endeavor, as always until the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, is the science of the human body, medicine, which is also nearly the only place where it was imagined any practical application of scientific knowledge could be made. Concerning these details of explanation, Plato suggests that searching them out (through pure speculation, it seems) is a high-minded sort of hobby that some philosophers might undertake, but only a hobby. No doubt the lack of seriousness about the sciences is due not only to its lack of practical application, but also its uncertainty. There is some explanation of the variety of metals and stones to be found, and here’s one that might be spun out from his theory, Plato thinks, but others are always perfectly possible, and no one can know these things. If one is seeking a practical outcome from philosophy it is not here, but in the application of all this to the understanding of human life, the political and the ethical.

Timaeus the only dialogue with which the Middle Ages was familiar, and the organicist thesis in it, that the world is a living organism with a soul, was considered as essential to Platonism as the theory of Forms. The influence on Whitehead in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

And this reveals the problem with Platonic intermediaries. If we are to bring what is into connection with what becomes, something needs to happen. Even if the connection is from all eternity, and it pretty clearly is not, something needs to establish the connection. But we can only understand and describe what falls under the Forms, and so what already imitates the Forms. So Plato falls into talk about how mysterious the connection is—what is leaves an impression on what becomes “in a marvelous way that is hard to describe,”\textsuperscript{386} the receptacle is not earth or fire, but “if we speak of it as an invisible and characterless sort of thing, one that

\textsuperscript{385} Plato did not share the notion of the Pythagoreans and Empedocles that the human soul could be reborn into an animal.

\textsuperscript{386} \textit{Timaeus} 50c.
receives all things and shares in a most perplexing way in what is intelligible, a thing extremely difficult to 
comprehend, we shall not be misled. But then he tries to comprehend it, and so distinguishes what is, 
“which has not been brought into being and is not destroyed, which neither receives into itself anything else 
from anywhere else, nor itself enters into anything anywhere,” from the thing “that shares the other’s name 
and resembles it,” which “can be perceived by the senses” and “has been begotten.” He then introduces space 
as the place where this thing comes to be and perishes.

If this is to help at all, then we must think of what becomes as located in space, and possessed of spatial 
dimensions. This cannot be due to participation in a Form, though. It has dimensionality but no shape. There 
is no Form of location or of spatial extension, though spatial extension and location make it possible to take 
on geometrical Forms. That makes a certain amount of sense, but has what becomes ceased to be utterly 
featureless? If it can take on geometrical Forms because it is in space and extended, then it has a couple of 
properties of itself, in virtue of which it can imitate geometrical Forms. Do we understand what those 
properties are? Can we talk about them? Either Parmenides is right, and we can only think or speak of that to 
which we can assign a definite character that it has necessarily, or he is not right. But he must be right if Plato 
is to argue for the separated Forms, and for the distinction between what is and what becomes. Plato must have 
thought that what becomes takes on a relationship to space (comes to be in it in a certain place) which is not 
necessary, and as a result becomes capable of participating in geometrical Forms. But then how do we refer 
to this space and talk about it? It is eternal, perhaps, and unchangingly what it is, and so, like the Forms, it 
passes the Parmenidean test for what is thinkable. So we have three eternal things, unchanging in themselves, 
space, what is, and what becomes, and what becomes enters into a new relationship with space, thereby 
becoming what exists as a natural object, and in virtue of this relationship can now enter into a further 
relationship with geometrical Forms. Everything we speak of is a defining feature of some unchanging, eternal 
thing, and all change results only as these eternal things enter into different relationships with one another. The 
picture is fundamentally the same picture that we get from a physical thinker such as Empedocles, with his four 
eternal and unchanging roots located in space, and thus entering into changing relationships with one another. 
Moreover, in the end Plato’s relationships are spatial and temporal, just like those of Empedocles. The new 
wrinkle is the insistence on the separation of the Forms. And even that may not quite extend to the different

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387 *Timaeus* 51a.

388 *Timaeus* 52a.
stuff making up the universe. We are told that there are four kinds, air, earth, fire and water, the roots of Empedocles, which separated from one another into concentric spheres due to the shaking of the universe, which was in constant, irregular motion. Before they separated out the four kinds “lacked all proportion and measure, and at the time the ordering of the universe was undertaken, fire, water, earth and air initially possessed certain traces of what they are now.” So it seems as though we need to begin not simply with what becomes located in space for what becomes to take on geometrical shapes, but we need to have different sorts of what becomes, presumably so that the boundaries between the different sorts can define the geometrical shapes introduced. But, of course, there is no account how what has no features at all to define it can sort itself out into these four kinds without first imitating the Forms. What traces of what they are now did things then possess? It is not said, and if it were said, that would only make the problem that much more intractable. The intermediary can only do its work, joining what becomes to what is, by enabling it to imitate it, if we can speak about the situation and describe how it does its work. But we can’t do that unless there is something other than the Forms (and space) that can be spoken of. We need kinds of stuff that are not the kinds they are through participation, and Plato seems to provide these, as we have seen, with fire and earth, as they exist independently of the geometrical form they have in space. Perhaps we can take it that the sensory qualities of which one is immediately aware associated with vision are this unformed light, and those associated with touch are earth. They take on form as they come to be located in space, and so can be treated as the building blocks from which the bodies of embodied souls can be constructed.

All of this is so inadequate philosophically to explain the matter that one can’t help but assume that it must be meant metaphorically. One issue is whether the production of the universe by the Craftsman actually takes place in time or not. [Eternity—Timaeus 37d, Parmenides 140c-142a, see Sorabji (1983), Richard Patterson (1985). "The Eternality of Platonic Forms." Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie 67:27-46.] This seems likely to be a mythological expression of eternal relations. Another issue is whether Plato intends those apparently eternal relations to involve anything other than minds and Forms. Neoplatonists later interpreted the Timaeus in Idealist terms, which helped with the problem of the character of the substrate—it is nothing real at all, but simply represents one aspect of mind’s construction of actuality in time from the Forms. We should take Plato, though, as intending a real dualism. Something partakes in the Forms, and it is due to its

389 Timaeus 53b.
material construction that it can imitate the Forms in another medium, as it were. Whatever the problems with what that thing that partakes in the Forms might be, that seems to have remained Plato’s conviction.

Plato seems to be taking sides in disputes throughout his cosmology. He asserts that there is only one world, as opposed to the views of the Ionians that there are many worlds, that the one world does not have anything outside it, as opposed to the view of, say, Democritus, that a world may even collide with another. He asserts that the world is perfectly circular in form and has no source from which destruction can come to it. His cosmology seems to be that of Parmenides and Empedocles. Does the world, then, go through cycles of order and disorder, like the Italian worlds do? That might explain the business of the world being created by the demiurge—it would look to the point at which Love enters the world, say. But then what is the most perfect form of the world? Well, it seems that it would not be a situation in which all things are completely mixed, but rather the current situation, with its elegant mathematical structure. The stage at which all things are mixed would have to be identified with the chaotic situation before the Craftsman took a hand.