

Plato

Lonergan Institute for the “Good Under Construction” © 2017

At a certain stage in Plato's thought there seem to be asserted two really distinct worlds, a transcendent world of eternal forms, and a transient world of appearance¹...the world of theory and the world of common sense...Plato's *phainomena* and *noumena*²...the ascent from the darkness of the cave to the light of day is a movement from a world of immediacy that is already out there now to a world mediated by the meaningfulness of intelligent, reasonable, responsible answers to questions.³

Plato (427/8-348/7 BC), who was regarded by some as the father of idealism as a distinct school of philosophy, was born of an old aristocratic family. He had two brothers and a sister who had a son, Speusippos, who succeeded Plato as head of the Academy. He was given a typical education though it was said that Athens itself was his most notable educator. As an author, he first wrote poems and then, in his 40s, began to compose his more famous dialogues. Later disillusionment with life in Athens (in a manner which was especially fueled by the military defeat of Athens at the hands of Sparta in 404) led him to the thought and the practice of philosophy as the starting point of his subsequent thought and reflections. At age 20, he had met Socrates, his subsequent philosophical work serving as an intellectual monument to Socrates where, in order to propose a solid theory of doctrine for the arts and practice of government, as a preliminary, he sought to establish a stable philosophic base. On the death of his beloved Socrates in 399, at age 29, he left Athens for a time before eventually returning to found the Academy in 390. Besides visiting Egypt, he made three journeys to southern Italy of which his most important visits were to Sicily where he probably met some disciples of Pythagoras who probably influenced him with respect to the role and the significance of abstraction as a way of thinking or cogitating which moves away from the givens of sense perception toward the givens of number and the primacy of mathematics within the practice of philosophy and science; more precisely, from the Pythagoreans, to an initial extent,⁴ the primacy of form or the primacy of structure replaces the primacy of matter. A thing's form or a thing's structure (alternatively, a thing's essence or a thing's nature)⁵

¹Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 50.

²Lonergan, *A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S. J.*, eds. William F. J. Ryan, S. J. and Bernard J. Tyrrell, S. J. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), p. 226.

³Lonergan, *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S. J.*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe, S. J. (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985), p. 193.

⁴Please note, at this point, that to Plato belongs the credit for first positing a real distinction (a clear distinction) between the materiality of that which exists as matter, a material principle, and the immateriality of that which exists as form, a formal principle. They two are not to be confused with each other. Such a distinction did not exist among the Pythagoreans although, given the mathematical kind of analysis which they engaged in, a basis was created which eventually led to conclusions which pointed to the reality of a real distinction. Matter and form can be related to each other (they are related to each other) although, in their individual reality, they totally differ from each other. They exclude each other. Cf. Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, pp. 55-56.

⁵Please note also, at this point, that a careful analysis can reveal or, in fact, should reveal why a thing's form can be distinguished from a thing's essence although, in both cases, the form of a thing and the essence of a thing share a common nature, a common intelligibility, which would then explain what a given thing is or why it exists or behaves in the way that it does. The form of a thing is another way

explains a thing's being and how or why it exists and behaves in the way that it does. Plato later used the Pythagorean doctrine of numbers in order to develop his metaphysical doctrine of the Forms and how these exist with a reality which is peculiar to their order. He later claimed, in the context of his own thought, that the study of mathematics was the best preparation for the work and pursuit of philosophy.

With respect to Plato's Academy, it was established in a grove not far from Athens, so named since it was housed in a building that was devoted to the legendary Greek hero, Academos. It was the first university in the west in the eyes of some ("let no one ignorant of geometry enter here"⁶) and it endured for about 900 years.⁷ In conjunction with gymnastic training, basic studies were in arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and the harmonics of sound employing dialogue and discourse. The Academy had scientific equipment and a library. Its educational aim was: to train men's minds to enable them to think for themselves in the light of reason. Its method seems to have been research under supervision in a joint effort that involved both pupil and teacher (employing a form of dialectical method). In 366 and 361, he made two more trips to Sicily and in one bad experience he had to flee Syracuse in his failure to educate as a philosopher the son of the tyrant of Syracuse who hated philosophy. Here he had tried to implement his belief that heads of state needed to be philosophers if they were to be good rulers.

The key to understanding Plato's philosophy lies in an understanding of what was happening in Athens in his own lifetime. An overemphasis on the golden age of Pericles in Athens blinds us to the fact that this was a short period of only about 30 years in the middle of the 5th Century. Instability soon came in with the inception of the Peloponnesian War in 430 when Athens then went through a number of political regimes that were denominated by tyranny, oligarchy, and bouts of popular democracy. By Aristotle's time, democracy was in disrepute in contrast to the time of Pericles which had favorably viewed democracy as a good. Aristotle described democracy as the power of the poor to oppress the rich. In view of the degrading character of public life, Plato's first question therefore asked if society was somehow fatally corrupt. The climatic character of Socrates's death then caused him to ask who and what man was if men could put somebody like Socrates to death. Since Plato looked for stability in an unstable world, he asked where we should look for it where, in the context of this search, he

of speaking about the nature of a thing or the intelligibility of a thing. The essence of a thing is known by us through the realization of a definition which emerges as the term of an act of conceptualization which itself emerges or proceeds from a prior act of understanding. In understanding or grasping the essence of any given thing through an act of conceptualization, a thing's form or a thing's nature is joined to a specification of matter which has been universalized, a specification of matter which refers not to any instances of particular matter (the terms that belong to our different acts of sensing) but to an apprehension of matter which exists as common matter or universal matter. If, for instance, we should know the essence of an oak tree, we would know this in terms of two universals which have been joined together: a form or a nature has been joined to a specification of materiality that belongs to each and every oak tree or, in other words, a specification of matter which belongs to all oak trees. The materiality or the common matter of all oak trees is not to be confused with the materiality or the common matter which belongs to maple trees. Operationally speaking, in articulating these distinctions, the form of analysis which is employed is a way of thinking that comes to us from the later science (or the later philosophy) of Aristotle, Plato's most famous pupil.

⁶Osborne, *Philosophy for Beginners*, p. 13.

⁷Sullivan, *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 40.

engaged in dialogues with Socrates before the bar of history, Athens needing a reformer (like Socrates) who could introduce a measure of stability into the social order. His concern for establishing a stable base for the reform of Athenian life led him to assert the doctrine of the forms which allowed him to speak about what is abiding and eternal in both the natural and human worlds.

On Plato's writings (Socrates's *Apology*, 7-8 letters, and about 34 dialogues), their character differs from Aristotle's in two respects. First, most scholars feel that we have all of Plato's actual writings while little of his oral teaching is preserved through the surviving notes of his students. Second, with the exception of two or three dialogues in political philosophy, the Platonic dialogues cannot be ordered in a systematic way since he did not write them in that way. One can approach Aristotle's work systematically but not Plato's. Three periods can be distinguished in the context of Plato's writing. First, his dialogues of the first period consist of true Socratic conversations since, soon after Socrates's death, his words were still fresh in his mind. Scholars note the lively character of the conversations. Second, gradually, on the basis of what Socrates had been teaching, from about 385 BC on,⁸ Plato began to introduce two new teachings of his own: (1) his own ideas through the mouth of Socrates when his ideas had become fixed (Aristotle later noted in his *Metaphysics* that Socrates himself had not separated forms from the sensible world but that this separation and the transcendence of forms is to be regarded as a Platonic idea) and (2) myths of his own where, by an innovation in his literary style, he introduced the myth as a species of symbolic story by which he could expound some of his doctrine. He adds poetical elements, the most beautiful dealing with the themes of immortality and death and the formation of the world in the *Timaeus* by the Demiurge. Third, at the end of his life, Plato tends to leave the dialogue form by giving more prosaic continuous expositions of his doctrine. Dramatic and poetic notes disappear in dialogues that contain conversational responses of an elementary "yes" or "no" character coming from shadowy characters, the *Timaeus* being an example of this. In conclusion, despite some discussion about the presence and absence of authenticity, 34 dialogues are generally accepted as authentic, the most famous from the above three periods being: the *Protagoras*, the *Apology* (Socrates's trial), and the first book of the *Republic*; the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, and the rest of the *Republic*; and the *Parmenides*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Laws*. Not all of Plato's writings have survived.

A scholarly approach to Plato's philosophy ought to be done in a twofold manner: systematically as this is done by Copleston and analytically as this has been done by others (for example, A. E. Taylor) in a manner which involves an analysis of the ideas that are to be found in Plato's dialogues.⁹ A systematic approach may not be the best to use because Plato never systematized his own work although, on the other hand, a systematic approach is of value for us as students and readers for the kind of comprehensiveness which it attempts to achieve and accomplish.

These things being said however, for the sake of a more thorough study of Plato's thought, no substitute exists for the good and the value of fully entering into one of Plato's dialogues as this is given to us in his texts as, in a personal manner, we try to participate in the conversations that are being produced or reproduced for our benefit, the adoption of an impersonal attitude being inadequate, simply insufficient (even if it should work or even if it best works for a study of philosophy and science as we should find this in the conceptuality which comes to us from the thought of Aristotle and Aquinas). In the context of Plato's dialogues, the dramatization of the conflicts and tensions that exist between different persons

⁸Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, p. 58, n. 1.

⁹Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy Volume I*, p. 140.

(who exist as interlocutors) suggests that, as readers, we all need to enter into the drama of concrete situations as we should find them in any given text since Plato's philosophy is not only a critique of the ups and downs of Athenian life but, at the same time too, it also summons readers to engage in a radical form of self-questioning. The object is a reordering of our own thinking and understanding in a way that can bring a new order of objects into the compass and the grasp of our human apprehension.¹⁰ From the possible genesis of an intellectual kind of conversion, a moral type of conversion can become more likely in terms of how we should begin to live and exist as human beings. By way of dialogue and discourse, an unrestricted *eros* is shown to exist within human souls: as a species of first principle, a desire for an unrestricted knowledge of things leads to a higher and a greater desire which yearns for an unrestricted experience of all things that are good or this unrestricted desire for understanding is absorbed by a higher and greater desire which exists as an unrestricted experience of all things that happen to be good.¹¹ The desire for understanding is explained by the being of a moral or ethical desire which is the proximate ground of human moral activity.

In order to create conditions that could then lead to the raising or to the lifting of our human morality activity (one that is less subject to contradictions and the anomie of relativity, relatively speaking), begin to move toward an understanding of being or reality as this exists in the construction and the elaboration of metaphysics and then, from there, move toward a political and a private morality that are both grounded in realities which never change, realities which exist within a world that is constituted by the being of eternally existing Ideas, eternally existing Forms. Plato speaks about Ideas; Aristotle, Forms. In a manner which points to the urgency or the primacy of Plato's practical concerns, the reform of the state is such that it cannot occur unless it is in the hands of persons (whether one or many) who are endowed with a knowledge of eternal Ideas or Forms: persons, individuals, who understand and know about the good of metaphysics; persons who are trained in the arts of philosophical reflection. For both Socrates and Plato, our human ignorance accounts for all kinds of evil that inevitably result since we cannot realize an ideal state (a truly good state) that is founded on the practice of justice if we should not know what, in fact, justice is as a condition or virtue (its Idea, its Form, its nature, its intelligibility; or justice as it exists in itself as the primary or chief principle of an implementable order that will determine the kind of order which should exist within a given state, the good of order within a state facilitating all attainments of virtue and good habits that can be acquired and practiced by individuals who should live within the confines of a particular state).¹² From the ordering that is given in justice comes the possibility of our human freedom, our human freedom existing not as a departure from the influence of existing laws but as movement toward the being of laws which serve to create a context that is ordered in a way which creates a just context. As living human beings, we all need to meditate on the meaning and being of justice (on the kind of order which exists within justice as its meaning and reality) and politicians, most especially, must be philosophers since they need real insights (true, critical philosophical insights) if they are to operate successfully within the context of their public life, making decisions that are geared toward the realization of the public common good which can only truly emerge if a good order of things exists within the life of a political state.

Because of our ignorance, in the context of our life and work, if we are to be proximate sources of good in the conduct of our individual lives, we must always go back and attend to the order of our thinking

¹⁰McCarthy, *Authenticity as Self-transcendence*, p. 56.

¹¹McCarthy, *Authenticity as Self-transcendence*, p. 57.

¹²Rommen, *Natural Law*, p. 12.

and understanding, re-examining our thinking and understanding, and so ask if, in fact, we really and truly know what we are in fact claiming to understand and know in a given concrete context (as this was done or as this is illustrated for us, for instance, in the text of Plato's *Republic* where the first book poses a question which looks for the being of an intelligible, intelligent answer to a question which asks "what is justice?"; how can we distinguish between the presence and absence of justice in the context of our human life?).

With respect then to the ways and means of Plato's approach, the method which he uses in the articulation and the labors of his philosophy, understanding this method of inquiry best prepares us for understanding the kind of results which Plato achieved in his conclusions and judgments since, through Plato's notion and practice of dialectics (the kind of dialectical reasoning that he was using in order to sort differences and move toward a possible conclusion), we have a point of departure for understanding Plato's world of Ideas or Forms in a way which could lead us toward a true knowledge of them and a kind of life which could exist for us as the living of a truly good moral human life. Through an analysis of the arguments that can be found in Plato's Socratic dialogues, three techniques can be accordingly identified (three techniques that are used with each other, depending on the conditions of appropriateness which exist at a given time, in a given case):¹³ (1) the errors or falsehoods which exist in an opposing point of view are shown and known through a series of questions and answers which reveal where contradictions and falsehoods exist; (2) from a series of true propositions about particular cases, generalizations are drawn, again with the help of questions and answers; and lastly (3) with the help of questions and answers, definitions or concepts are defined through an interplay of analysis and synthesis in the movements or the kind of ordering which is occurring in the context of Plato's human reasoning (a reasoning which we can also participate in by the acts of reasoning which can also exist for us within the context of our personal performance). In Plato, a form of analysis works with distinctions to differentiate the meaning of a genus, indicating the being of different species and then, from a species, the being of different subspecies; and then, by moving from the kind of movement which exists in analysis to the kind of movement which exists in synthesis, species are brought together and they are collected and combined in a manner which points to the being of a genus and then too, from a collection of genera, the being of an even higher genus (a genus which points to a higher kind of being within the general order of things which is constitutive of metaphysics in terms of the object which is the subject matter of metaphysics).

By way of contrast thus, this notion of dialectic differs from both the Sophist art of discussion and from the Socratic form of dialectic which had consisted of a system of questions and answers that are needed if we are to arrive at the being of general definitions that could be always valid and true. In Plato, much more is involved than what is given in merely searching for Socratic definitions that would always be valid and true. Within the order of the kind of dialectical method that is to be associated with Plato's way of thinking, three steps can be distinguished in a manner which combines metaphysical components with cognitional components where, as a result, Plato's teaching about the being and the reality of Forms is joined to a species of serious discussion that is evidenced in the type of dialectic that is to be found in the praxis of a Socratic discussion as this occurs within any given dialogue.¹⁴ As a general principle or first premiss thus: "knowledge is true belief [that is] backed up by discourse."¹⁵ With respect however to the manner or the form of discourse, a species of fundamental

¹³Berman, *Law and Revolution*, pp. 146-147.

¹⁴Meynell, *Redirecting Philosophy*, p. 247.

¹⁵Plato, *Theaetetus*, 202C, as cited by Meynell, *Redirecting Philosophy*, p. 247 & n. 19.

unity (a tight relation) exists between the being or the use of metaphysical and cognitional principles where each suggests or points to the other: (1) the Spirit or *Nous* or Mind ascends to the world of the Forms; (2) the Spirit dwells in the world of the Forms for purposes of contemplation; and then (3) the Spirit descends again to the world of sensible things to bring into this world the influence of the Forms for purposes of introducing some kind of order where order has not previously existed. Three motions are involved. By a kind of analysis, we move toward the world of the Forms. We move toward first principles. Then, by a kind of synthesis or composition, we move from the higher world of Forms or Ideas toward the world of sensible things, moving through a non-mechanical form of deduction from the general to the particular (from the generality of an Idea or Form to the particulars that are given to us through our different acts of human sensing).¹⁶ However, in doing this, as a result, through the interaction of these two movements as they work together, an effect or a third movement or change is effected which is the discovery of previously unknown relations which exist within a world of lower existing things. In the practice of philosophy thus, through employing dialectical forms of reasoning as this reasoning encounters differences and distinctions within the being of things, interactions between variables connect variables with each other in a way which points to a species of union which is the being of a previously unknown relation (a relation between two or more variables). In any relation, in the most basic kind of relation, "x" is related to "y," or "x" is said to be related to "y." One variable is joined or it is ordered to another, both ways (vice versa). However, as this relation exists, endures, and lives, as this relation is understood and articulated, it can begin to point to the possible being (the possible discovery) of other variables (a third variable) which can now be known for the first time. A given relation, to the degree that it is more fully understood and known, by means of its reality or its intelligibility it soon points to the being of other possible relations and, from these relations, the possible being of other variables. If, in Sophistic arguments, the manner of proceeding is governed by the desire or the object of defeating or vanquishing an opponent apart from any considerations that pertain to the goodness and value of truth, in dialectical arguments (properly understood), its ground or basis is a desire and a search for truth; hence, its consequent object is an understanding or a comprehension of things which is able to grasp as much truth as this can be known or experienced by us as a term that belongs to a given act of understanding.¹⁷ A Sophist understanding of dialectic cannot be associated with a Platonic understanding of dialectic.

To illustrate the reciprocal or the species of tight relation which exists between the dialectical kind of reasoning that we find in Plato and the objects that are known (objects which can be known) through the kind of reasoning which Plato employs, in Plato's "simile of the Line" that is given in one of his major works, the *Republic*, states of awareness in our human cognition correlate with states of being or ontology as this is illustrated below in the following chart.¹⁸ Cognitional and metaphysical variables point to each other in a context which associates reason with a kind of intellectual seeing which exists as a kind of intellectual intuition (a species of contemplation):

States of Awareness (Epistemology)	States of Being (Ontology)	Examples
Pure reason, pure reasoning, mind as <i>nous</i>	Forms, Ideas	Form of Beauty
Intellection, <i>noesis</i> , understanding,	Concepts, theory, or	Concept of Beauty

¹⁶Berman, *Law and Revolution*, p. 133, p. 151.

¹⁷McCarthy, *Authenticity as Self-transcendence*, p. 57.

¹⁸Palmer, *Looking at Philosophy*, pp. 60- 64.

theorizing	definitions (not to be understood as empirical generalizations but as "images" of something higher that is given in the "Forms")	
Belief (classes as opinion because it is grounded in the uncertainties of our sense perception, <i>aisthesis</i>)	Particular objects (as in a particular horse or a particular act of justice)	Individual beautiful entities
Conjecture, mere sensory awareness (as persons mistake images for reality)	Images (shadows and reflections)	Imitations of beautiful entities as in paintings, photos, reflections, & shadows

Turning then to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, as this is given in chapter 7 of the *Republic*, besides illustrating the difference which exists between appearance and reality, this allegory also points in an allegorical fashion to Plato's dialectical understanding of education (his notion of a good education) where the cave represents shadowy existence with its opening leading toward light or truth and where its prisoners, chained by the neck and legs, represent most of humanity who remain in false opinions in having an inadequate view of the world although some manage to free themselves and find reality by turning their heads (symbolizing how we each find reality through some kind of conversion). Things can be richer from what is usually seen as witness the ascent we can make from the cave toward its mouth where we are able to deliver ourselves up to the light and so we can return later to the cave in order to help our fellow human beings. By describing the importance of descending into the cave by someone who has seen the light (which represents the Good), Plato shows his concern for introducing something stable into the conduct of ethical and private life in the education of other persons. To see and sense how Plato argues by way of the allegory of the Cave, we can cite from Plato's account in the *Republic* as this is given to us in one translation:¹⁹

[Socrates is speaking with **Glaucon**]

[Socrates:] And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: --Behold! human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

[Glaucon:] I see.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

¹⁹See <http://webpace.ship.edu/cgboer/platoscave.html> (accessed August 26, 2016).

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?

Yes, he said.

And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?

No question, he replied.

To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

That is certain.

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive some one saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision, -what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them, -- will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?

Far truer.

And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take and take in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

True, he said.

And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he 's forced into the presence of the sun himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.

Not all in a moment, he said.

He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day?

Certainly.

Last of he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water, but he will see him in his own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate him as he is.

Certainly.

He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and in a certain way the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Clearly, he said, he would first see the sun and then reason about him.

And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow-prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

Certainly, he would.

And if they were in the habit of conferring honours among themselves on those who were quickest to observe the passing shadows and to remark which of them went before, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honours and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer, *Better to be the poor servant of a poor master, and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner?*

Yes, he said, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner.

Imagine once more, I said, such an one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?

To be sure, he said.

And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.

No question, he said.

This entire allegory, I said, you may now append, dear Glaucon, to the previous argument; the prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.

Asking Plato's basic question: How should I live?²⁰

²⁰John M. Rist, *Real Ethics Reconsidering the Foundations of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 6.

In the consequent elaboration of his philosophy as Plato moves from asking ethical or moral questions toward asking metaphysical or ontological questions, in order to construct or to reveal an enduring order of existing things that is constitutive of reality (the being of things), as the basis or as the fundamental context for our possibly having a rational understanding of human moral life, Plato points to a metaphysical order of things by constructing and moving toward a metaphysical system that employs the following two step movement:

(1) Beginning with Socrates or, with Socrates, Plato first looks for general definitions of universal applicability through initially posing questions that directly relate to questions or concerns about virtuous forms of human living (given here that, in his day, Socrates had believed in the existence of objectively true definitions since he rejected a Sophist thesis which had asserted that man is the measure of all things). Hence: What is Justice? What is Temperance? What is Virtue? What is Goodness?²¹ Since virtue is knowledge, arriving at true definitions is necessary if we are to have virtue, if we are to live virtuously. However, from this point, Plato proceeds to ask about the real nature or the status of these definitions. Are they more than abstract? Do they have their own reality and what kind of reality is to be ascribed to them?

(2) Where Socrates leaves off, Plato begins to ask other questions about the existence of other realities. For instance, he begins to compare the objective character of the unknown content of the Socratic definitions with the real existence of numbers (given the Pythagorean influence on Plato and their thesis that things are numbers: the world can be explained through a geometrical pattern which can be classed as a reality which transcends our sense experience, being objective and unchangeable). Hence, through a species of expansion in inquiry, we have this progression or movement in Plato's analysis: What is Triangle? What is Circle? What is Round? What is One? What is Ten? What is Number? What is Up? What is Down? What is Right? What is Left? What is "Is" Itself?²² Moral goodness as it exists in itself (along with these other realities) could be a reality or a thing from which one can deduce a doctrine which affirms the existence of a world of eternally existing realities that is separate or apart from the world that we commonly experience and know, eternal realities that are called Forms or Ideas which can only be known by us through our human minds or through our intellects and not through our senses and even if, in the context of our human language and speech, we should use different words for the same thing, different words which refer to the same thing, the same reality. Similarly, when we apply the same predicate or the same word to a variety of different things, the sameness in meaning or the sameness in reference is explained by a quality which exists independently of the existence of any varying quantities. Determinations of quantity are transcended by determinations of quality. Redness or whiteness exists independently of any differences which would refer to determinations of time and space. Goodness or Justice, for instance, possess a form of objective existence. They exist independently of our minds and the way of thinking which belongs to our individual minds. Without their existence apart from our world (their objective existence), everything would collapse within the world within which we live and exist. If our world were to be destroyed, these higher realities would continue to exist in an eternal, unchanging kind of way.

To explain a bit more by way of contrast: while Kant also believed in the existence of a double world, unlike Plato, he denied that it is possible for our theoretical reason to know things as they are (as they exist). While Plato assumes that we can have

²¹Sullivan, *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 40.

²²Sullivan, *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 41.

knowledge (true knowledge) and that the only true objective knowledge is one which refers to a world of eternal realities, Kant says that we cannot reach a world of forms through reason. While Plato regarded the world of the senses as not real but shadowy, for Kant, the mind can only work with sensed phenomena: it is not able to enter the noumenal or real world where, for instance, while we must be just in our behavior, we cannot define the content of justice. While Plato's Ideas consist of many different kinds and degrees, as a whole at the top of the structure there exists the Idea of the Good, the supreme idea that links politics with ethics.

Plato on Knowing and Being

Respecting Plato's metaphysical theory, since, for Plato, real knowledge is restricted to a knowledge of things that never change, there must be immutable things, a world of immutable things. He declines to question the reality of our human cognition in terms of its ability to enjoy a knowledge of reality. On the origin of our real knowledge and how we reach it, Plato notes that more exists in knowledge than what experience can account for where, here, Plato disagrees with Aristotle who claims that knowledge is somehow abstracted or immaterially separated out from its initial givenness that is given to us in our experience. Since sensible things are particular and changeable, their very changeability prevents us from considering them as real, substantial, or important.

Citing an example that was used by Plato, when we pronounce a judgment on the beauty of something, we need a notion of what beauty is and since we need a higher or a transcendent notion of beauty in order to compare and contrast any instances of beauty that we encounter within our current form of human existence, this notion of beauty must come from somewhere else; exist somewhere else. Where Aristotle argues that we abstract the notion or the idea of beauty by bringing together a number of particular instances that exist within our sensible apprehensions (our sense perceptions), for Plato, since the reality of beauty is a much richer thing than anything that can be given in sense, cognitively, it can only be accounted for by a theory or a doctrine of reminiscence which reveals or points to how, from the context of our current viewpoint, allegedly, mythical elements at times continue to work within the texture of Plato's thought given his belief in the pre-existence of the human soul, the human soul existing or referring to the being of a rational human soul which is to be identified with the being of the human mind. While Plato's discussion of reminiscence is itself rather vague, in his theory of education as anamnesis (as recollection or as remembering), he believes that our reminiscence of a previous life explains both our real knowledge of things as this exists for us within our current life and also our ability to reconstruct or to rebuild in fabrications of various kinds that we engage in as makers and doers. The making that we do succeeds the knowing that we have.

Since we have already existed prior to our birth in this world, our birth entails a fall of some kind: a fall of our individual souls into a material body where, by this fall, a screen rises that now obscures what had been clearly known before. As long thus as we are still in our bodies, as long as we remain in our bodies, truth sleeps inside us. In a mythical view of Original sin, in a Platonic interpretation of Original sin as this has existed for some Christians, since the soul has forgotten its past, in some way, the truth inside ourselves must be awakened by a teacher who makes us each remember what we have already seen and known.

Again, by way of contrast and in a way which brings out the peculiarities of Plato's own teaching, the 3rd Century AD neoplatonist philosopher, Plotinus, introduced an

important difference in his method when he argued that man should not lose his memory of the present (instead of his memory of the past) since, for Plotinus, the whole of reality is to be equated with that which exists as the One which is itself so rich and so full of being that it cannot be called being anymore. This One, as a terrific source of being, overflows into other beings through a species of elastic emanation where, the further away something is from the Divine Being, the less being it, in fact, possesses. Thus, the goal of our lives is to remember where we belong at the end of this elastic since man's tragedy is the fact that he forgets who he is although, for Plato, man's tragedy lies in the fact that he has forgotten who he was (what he has been).

Plato illustrates the rationality of his theory in the *Meno* by a story about Socrates who elicited, from an untutored slave boy, the answer to a difficult mathematical problem by having him answer yes or no to a series of simple questions that led to the construction of a square twice the area of a given square. The slave boy always knew the answers to the questions that were posed although, self-consciously, he did not know that he knew these answers. Plato's theory of recollection is thus the source of a Freudian conception of the unconscious where the task or role of the psychoanalyst is to help a patient remember things that have been forgotten at a conscious level. One moves to apprehensions that exist in a preconscious way.

At the same time too, in the kinds of judgments which we make as human knowers and also by the kinds of questions which we ask as potential knowers, the transcendence or the self-transcendence of the human mind is a reality which is made apparent to us in the awareness that we have of ourselves in our different acts of human cognition and, at the same time too, in order to secure or to explain the kind of self-transcendence which belongs to us as human knowers, Plato moves toward the construction of a metaphysics that can serve as a species of adequate foundation. The truth or the stability of our judgments turns towards foundations that exist within the order or the science of being which exists within our knowledge of metaphysics.²³

Since the Ideas come not from sensible things (allegedly, the Ideas do not exist within sensible things), Plato's world view in this context is clearly divided into a species of dualism with reminiscence (memory) the only real link between the existence of two worlds that we can know about as human beings and, in different ways, live in and belong to. One world is immediately known by us within the context of our current material, physical life (strictly though our various acts of human sensing); the second world, through the instrumentality of the first kind of knowledge that is given to us within our various acts of human sensing if this first kind of knowledge is seen to exist as a point of departure when we then move toward the kind of human knowing which properly exists for us as Knowledge (true knowledge).

With respect to the first kind of knowing and the first world that is known by us as an initial point of departure, for Plato, unlike Aristotle, sensation functions at times as a species of alarm clock (it exists as a species of pointer or as a warning). The sensible world is always immediately given to us at the very start of things within the order of our human cognition and, at the same time too, it can serve as the occasion for our obtaining real knowledge of another world which exists through the real

²³Robert Spitzer, *Finding True Happiness Satisfying Our Restless Hearts* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015), pp. 62-64; *Soul's Upward Yearning Clues to Our Transcendent Nature from Experience and Reason* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015), p. 122.

knowledge that we can have of something that is somehow really inside ourselves, something that exists within us (within our subjectivity): the world as the object or the term of our intellectual knowledge; the world as the object of our receptive and our active intelligence though we often employ a type of language which would have us speak about how our mental or our psychological knowing exists as a species of spiritual or intellectual intuition: an internal spiritual seeing versus an ocular, outer, visual seeing.

However, since our human knowing is not something which is purely mental or intellectual (since, then, with it or through it, it would be impossible us to commit any error or make any mistakes), it is something which must somehow arise through an interaction of sorts which must exist between perceiver and perceived, a perceiver and a perceived, under the overall guidance of that which exists as the human soul or the human mind where, in the context of our human understanding and knowledge, the soul moves itself in its understanding and knowing. Understanding exists as an activity and not as a passivity or reception. It is the soul (the "eye of our soul,"²⁴ or the spiritual soul) which apprehends things like identity, difference, existence, and number through anamnesis or the remembering of our individual souls.²⁵ Through these categories thus, the real or true world of things is known, an intelligible, immaterial world and not a material, physical, sensible, perceptible world (what is real is that which is intelligible)²⁶ although, oddly enough and perhaps incoherently,²⁷ the physical perceptible world is only known for that which it is if it is understood or grasped from a point of view which is grounded in the being of a world which is imperceptible because, as we have noted, it exists entirely as an intelligible world and it is only known through that which exists as our intellectual or mental acts.

In Plato's theory of hypothesis and deduction, a hypothesis (literally, a "putting-underneath") has to explain "the facts" or, in other words, "save the appearances," since, if, in some way, a fact does not square with a proffered hypothesis, a new hypothesis is needed in a search that must always head us toward the being of a bigger, more comprehensive general thesis.²⁸ The ultimate search is always directed toward a giant hypothesis which would explain that which exists as the good.

Although Plato's view of reality can be constructed in terms of a twofold differentiation of levels (a Parmenidean kind of being or a Parmenidean notion of being opposing a Heraclitean kind of being or a Heraclitean notion of being),²⁹ it can be considered in the following threefold manner as we begin from that which allegedly exists at the top and as we would move downwards toward lower levels of being. The existence of different levels within the order of being suggests that some things possess more reality than other things and so, as a consequence, being itself has a connotation or a significance which points not to a univocal notion or a univocal concept of being but, instead, to a variable notion of being which exists as a species of analogy as we move from something that we know to a possible knowledge

²⁴Sullivan, *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 44.

²⁵Osborne, *Philosophy for Beginners*, p. 14.

²⁶Meynell, *Redirecting Philosophy*, p. 252.

²⁷Contrast a way of speaking which says about Plato's understanding of science and cognition that the physical or natural world is such that it can only be known by us through our acts of human sensing and not by any other means. Literally, if this is so, then our knowledge of subsistent, eternal forms is of no avail to us with respect to understanding the world within which we happen to live. Cf. Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, p. 70.

²⁸Osborne, *Philosophy for Beginners*, p. 14.

²⁹Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 37.

of something that perhaps we will begin to know.³⁰ An analogous notion of being or, more succinctly, by way of an analogy of being [an *analogia entis*], different kinds of being can be distinguished from each other in a way which shares a common meaning (the truthfulness about the being of existence) while, at the same time, also moving beyond or transcending an undifferentiated notion of being which would seem to follow and to be determined and limited if we were to focus our attention solely on the principle of the Excluded Middle as this exists as a law within deductive logic (i.e., a statement of fact is “either true or it is not true”),³¹ and so, from this rule, conclude about being (about the being of all things in general) that something either is (it exists) or, on the other hand, it does not exist. Within this perspective of having to choose thus between being and non-being, beyond any question which simply asks if something exists or if something is true, nothing more is to be asked about, noticed, or said. Nothing more about being needs to be adverted to.

To clarify how we are to understand what we mean when we speak about the analogy of being, its meaning can be more fully understood if we attend to the wording and the meaning of an opposing, contrary notion: a univocal or an unequivocal notion of being or, in other words, a conception or a meaning for being which thinks in terms of its having a univocal significance (hence, the univocity of being). To begin with a point of origin which comes to us from the 11th Century AD and the thought of a Muslim philosopher, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna c. 980-1037): although a real distinction exists between God and creatures (God being the creator of creatures and all creatures existing as created things that differ from God), in our understanding of divine and human things as this exists in us as human subjects, in any predications that can be entertained about the being of God and about the being of created things, the meaning of any predicates or attributes that are ascribed to God do not differ from the meaning of any predicates or attributes that are ascribed to the being of other things. For example, if we say that God is good, the goodness of creatures does not differ from the goodness of God. In the kind of argument that Avicenna uses: *being*, as a determination of qualities or properties, exists as a kind of *a priori*. It is endowed with a wholeness or an integrity which excludes any kind of differentiation in any predicates that we can use to speak of other things and this wholeness or integrity is something which commonly belongs to both the being of God and the being of all creatures. If something is or exists, then, in virtue of its being or existence, it shares in the same properties or in the same attributes which belong to anything in terms of its being or existence. Whatever is said about God means the same as that which can be said about human beings and vice versa.³² Hence, if within the order of scientific determination and predication, predicates enjoy a form of invariant significance, then, from such a standpoint, predicates that are used to speak about a given kind of thing cannot be used to speak about other kinds of things in a way which would point to real differences which would exist among these other things. In the context of any kind of theology, we would begin to speak about how God exists in the same way that we would use to speak about how we exist as human beings and so,

³⁰Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 36.

³¹Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word*, p. 149.

³²Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2012), p. 37; Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Religious Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 26-27.

as a result, inevitably, a form of reductionism takes away from the transcendence which belongs to God, relative to being of everything else which exists within our world. Univocal determinations of meaning function as a species of leveling agent within the order of our thinking and understanding.

With respect then to the existence of different kinds of things and how, in fact, they are ordered to each other, a tripartite ordering of distinctions is to be adverted to:

(1) A real world of unchanging things exists by itself and it refers to an unchanging intelligible world of pure Forms or Ideas (the forms being referred to as "ideas" which can only be known by us through our acts of the mind and not our acts of sense, existing not merely as ideas that are located within our minds). From sensible similarities that are experienced by us through our various acts of human sensing, we cannot assume or suppose that, thus, an objectively existing intelligible Form or Idea is to be postulated as a reality that is to be known through an act which differs from an act of human sensing.³³ Since objects of thought or of intellection are immutable and unchangeable (they function as a limited number of basic *patterns* for all that we perceive in the world), their role and task implies a form of objective status which differs from Socrates's notion of objective status as that which refers in his case to the subject or the thesis of a universal concept or a universal definition although, if we should want to account for the validity of any kind of universal, eternal knowledge that we can possibly have which can be expressed as a concept or definition, we would have to turn to the Forms or the Ideas of Plato which exist as "eternal, immutable, subsistent, immaterial, intelligible" realities although, admittedly, not as living, conscious, intelligent realities.³⁴ By means of Forms or Ideas, we can explain why, in our experience, resemblances exist, why "x" resembles "y." Or, in other words, we can move from experiences of resemblance (as in this looks like that according to our apprehensions of sense) to a possible explanation of the resemblances that we could be experiencing in a given case in our apprehensions of sense.³⁵

For the sake of further understanding by way of contrast, please distinguish between a general category or concept which can be used to refer to a resemblance or a similarity of some kind that is experienced by us in our acts of sensing and a general category or concept which can be used to refer to an Idea or a Form that is grasped by our understanding. An Idea or Form is something which is understood. Names or labels can be used to distinguish a class of objects that is known in terms of how a group of particulars resemble each other. Many living creatures can be subsumed under a general label which refers to them all as "cats," the class of all cats. However, if we are to understand what exactly is the nature of any given cat or why a given creature is a cat and not some other kind of being, we need to refer to the thesis of a possible explanation and, if or when this kind of understanding is given to us, we would then have that which exists as the Idea or the Form of a cat. A nominalist or an empiricist species of cognition is to be associated with a familiarity which refers to the experience of resemblances that can be known through their descriptions (nominalism exists as a school of thought within philosophy); but, on the other hand, a realist species of cognition

³³Meynell, *Redirecting Philosophy*, pp. 242-243.

³⁴Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Incarnate Word*, trans. Charles C. Hefling Jr., eds. Robert M. Doran and Jeremy D. Wilkins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), p. 395.

³⁵Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 37.

exists through explanations that are known through an understanding and knowledge of Ideas or Forms. The realism which exists is something which is understood if we should refer to how it is constituted by how understanding exists within an understander and so, from this understanding, we have the experience of a datum which exists as an understood, grasped meaning. The meaning exists as an intelligibility. It is the term of an act of understanding.

As a fundamental idea that Plato adhered to all his life, universals really and truly possess an objective ontological status since, as thought and because thought and not sense grasps reality, the objects of our thought must exist as universals which always hold. No deceptions are possible because they are intelligible in themselves (akin, for instance, to the unchanging nature of a triangle or the unchanging nature of a square in mathematics),³⁶ and so they must have a species or type of reality which surpasses any kind of reality which belongs to things that are always changing, especially anything which is capable of changing itself and which, by its self-changing, is always ceasing to be what it is or has been as it moves from its current condition of being toward a condition of non-being, relative to its current condition of being. With respect to changing things and especially with respect to self-changing things, a lack of fullness perennially exists with respect to the manner of its existence as a given thing is always becoming something else, the something else in turn possibly changing to become something else again *ad infinitum*. Self-changing things are “inherently transitory.”³⁷

In time, as Plato began to develop his basic thesis, he began to devote more attention to the nature of concepts in a manner which appears to be more concrete: concepts, for instance, such as “horseness” and “tableness,” giving to them also a species of universal status that is conjoined to a form or manner of existence that is other or objective. However, in doing this, his theory becomes more confused since it is not so easy to identify the objective essence of that which exists as “horseness” with the objective status of “horseness” in terms of its real being or its real existence. Please distinguish here between the objectivity of an apprehended idea (its transcendence) and the objectivity of an idea if we should refer to whether it is a true or a real idea. Although, with Socrates, it is easier to talk about the objective existence of values (the true, the good, the beautiful), on the other hand however, Plato did not abandon his belief in the existence of universal concrete concepts. They possess their own objective ontological status. Since the objects that are grasped in universal concepts correspond to universal terms of predication, they exist somewhere within a transcendental world, apart from our sensible world. For instance, the general word “horse” refers not to any particular horse but to any horse whatever. There is, somewhere or other, an ideal horse which exists outside of space and time. The idea is real; the particular horse is something which is only apparent.

However, in saying all these things, to avoid confusion, perhaps it would be best to say that we should distinguish between two notions of reality or two anticipations about the nature of reality that are operative in the context of Plato's thought, two notions of reality that are not entirely distinguished from each other. One kind is known inwardly by us through a true predication that is directly experienced by us within the life of our cognitive souls (our intellectual souls); the other refers to a form of existence which is somehow external or “out there”: a species or a notion of being which is derived or which is modeled on the extroversion that we can come to know about if we should attend to how we experience or know about objects within the kind of confrontation which exists within the

³⁶Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, pp. 56-57.

³⁷Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, p. 56.

functioning of our sense perceptions. Taking this model and applying it, in the *Timaeus*, Plato teaches that God, the Demiurge, forms our world according to a set of exemplary eternally existing Forms. The Forms exist apart from the Demiurge in the same way that the data of sense (the objects of sense) exist apart or externally from the different acts of human sensing. The otherness or the externality of a transcendental order of forms resembles the otherness or the externality which belongs to the immanent kind of order which exists if we should refer to the immediacy of our sense perceptions: our human acts of sensing encounter objects that are other than ourselves, other than the subjectivity which individually belongs to us and these same objects function as provocative external agent objects in activating the kind of receptivity which belongs to our different acts of human sensing when a given act of sensing is reduced or is put into a condition of act as a species of effect. Acts of sense are elicited by what these acts sense. For an example, think about how the external sounding of a bell intrudes upon our sense perception in a way which produces the sounding which exists within our acts of hearing. The louder the sound, the more likely will be our hearing of it. The hearing will be inevitable.

However, within the context of this way of imagining, thinking, and speaking, the problem of a bridge will be created in terms of how we are to understand the dynamics of our human cognition. The unchanging intelligible forms exist in a manner which continues to be apart or separate from the subjectivity of our individual human existence. Plato cannot explain too well how the world of sense is joined to the higher world of Ideas, how these two worlds are related to each other in a fruitful, complementary manner. Both worlds exist as externalities. While, in his later dialogues, Plato speaks about a species of participation (*methexis*), the being of some kind of participation (in some way, the world of sense participates in a world which exists if we should refer to the higher, transcendental world of Forms), the problem of status and relation remains in the articulation of his thought and so, in voicing their objections, some critics have argued in one respect that, in further determining or expanding the world of Ideas or Forms (what exactly exists within this larger world), allegedly, to an excessive degree, it is said that Plato unnecessarily duplicates the world of our ordinary experience. In shifting to a world which is constituted by extraordinary species of human experience, it is that which is given to us if our point of reference is here a knowledge of objects or Forms that never shift or change with respect to the determinations which respectively belong to them; they are is not subject to change. Never is their content receptive or open to the possibility of revisions which would exist as changes and alterations.

With respect to this world of the forms, three points or three characteristics can be distinguished and noted:

1. This world of the forms is hierarchically arranged and, in the language of the *Republic*, the Idea of the Good is identified as the Form which exists at the top (in a manner which points to a link which exists with the teachings of Plato's ethical theory) although, in the language of the *Symposium*, it is the Idea of the Beautiful which is identified to exist at the top as the primary principle of order for all else with respect to the forms that follow.³⁸ In the tradition, however, which comes to us from the teaching of Plato's *Republic*: "the greatest thing to learn is the idea of the Good and that even if...we should know all other things...it would avail us nothing without knowing the Good."³⁹ As the sensible world and an awareness of it depend on the Sun, so the Forms and our knowledge of them depend on the Good which is the Super-Form or the Form of all Forms (symbolized allegorically by the Sun and its

³⁸Meynell, *Redirecting Philosophy*, p. 249.

³⁹Plato, *Republic* 6, 505a, as cited by Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 38.

contemplation). By attracting all things to itself as an ultimate final cause, it grounds the whole of reality as reality's source of being, all knowledge of anything being ultimately knowledge of that which is the Good. All things seek the Good, all things seek the Good for its own sake "with an intuition of its reality" although they are "baffled and unable to apprehend its nature."⁴⁰ In the kind of unity that is imparted to all the Forms or Ideas which exist within the world of unchanging Forms, possibly, we can speak about this wholeness in a way which accordingly thinks about it as some kind of "immaterial organism or animal."⁴¹ If the Milesians were able to think about the physical world as if it were a species of material organism, the use of this kind of analogy suggests a similar analogy which can begin to think about the world of unchanging Forms as a species of spiritual or intellectual animal that is endowed with a life of its own, Plato's Idea or Form of the Good suggesting or pointing to an understanding and conception of God that can be found in the articulation of his thought.

With respect to Plato's notion or conception of God, three possibilities have been postulated with respect to Plato's notion of God as we can find this in various texts and passages: (1) in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*, God exists as a soul, as a principle of action and activity, and not as a form or Idea since God's agency needs to be postulated if we are to account for the existence of change within the world of our ordinary experience; (2) in the *Republic*, if the highest form or Idea among all the existing forms is the Idea of the Good and if this form or Idea is the source or the origin of all the forms which exist and if all the other forms can be known through the degree that we know something about the Idea of the Good, then we can suppose or conclude that God is to be identified with Plato's supreme Idea of the Good; and (3) in the *Timaeus* also, God exists as a species of maker or creator: he is the Demiurge where, by beholding the order of pre-existing, eternal forms, he models and fashions the kind of world which exists and which we happen to live in.⁴²

On the relation of the Ideas with each other and so the kind of life that would exist among the different Forms, joining them all with each other, Plato offers less clear explanation. Despite the existence of an internal structure, how it is to be understood is not too clear to us nor was it possibly too clear to Plato although one negative feature can be alluded to if we suppose a general absence of movement that would sharply differ from the obvious kind of movement which we find within the lower world of sense that is known by us through our different acts of human sensing and which is directly known by us through our different acts of human sensing. The kind of life which exists within the world of the Forms is distinguished by how all the forms are joined and related to each other in a way which points to similarities and differences: hence, a dialectical kind of being which is not lacking in its own particular dynamism. This is not that and this suggests this and not that.

2. Not only do all forms and notions belong to this transcendent ideal world but these forms also belong to our human souls. Our souls participate in them for, though we each have our own minds, our minds in our thinking and understanding can enjoy a oneness which exists among them because our individual minds participate or they know about the same Form or Idea that is being known by us as individuals as if we exist as one mind. Through the principle of a transcendent Form or Idea, forms and ideas unite our minds with each other and, at the same time, they also unite the being of many distinct physical

⁴⁰Plato, *Republic* 6, 505e, as cited by Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 39.

⁴¹Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, p. 73.

⁴²Meynell, *Redirecting Philosophy*, p. 249.

objects with each other through the mediation of a form or idea that is being understood and known at a given time, in a given context. However, Plato's doctrine of the soul is difficult to understand because he is not that clear about what he means when he talks about the Soul and also about the souls of this world.

3. Knowing the Ideas requires recollecting what the human soul had once beheld within the transcendental world of the forms which differs from Aristotle's notion of abstraction which affirms or supposes that Ideas exist within the concrete.

In conclusion, Plato's world of forms consists of universal forms and of individual souls prior to their falling into a body which exists as the prison of the soul (in Plato's language). According to Copleston, Plato did not mean that his Ideas should be seen to exist in a space that is apart from the sensible world and sensible things since incorporeal essences do not have to occupy a place in the usual sense of the term. Plato only wants to show that the Ideas, in their importance, possess a transcendental meaning: things such as Beauty and Justice have an objective transcendental status, an objective reference, since, as transcendental things, they will not perish or decay (Plato's doctrine of the forms being a philosophical answer to the social and political instability of the contemporary Athens of his day). For Athens to reform itself, it needs a new metaphysics because of an intimate connection which exists between metaphysics and political theory. In the *Sophist*, Plato argues against Protagoras and other sophists who had taught that man was the measure of all things since Plato opposes all kinds of relativism in knowledge because the reform of political life in Athens cannot occur if such relativity is taught and held. Instead, a level of stability exists within the cosmos which, as known and taught, makes for virtue: knowledge is virtue, civilization being something that can be taught and communicated to other persons in a way which spreads civilization. Political knowledge can be transmitted from one generation to another. Instead of teaching Athenians the arts of persuasion and argument, one should develop an education with respect to in all that is stable (given the existence of objective truth as this is headed by Goodness).

(2) The world of Mathematical Objects exists as an intermediary between the two worlds of Form and sense which explains why mathematics must be studied in order really to educate someone for a knowledge of the Ideal World. This betrays the influence of the Pythagoreans on the thought and teaching of Plato. Since mathematical truths do not change, the doing of mathematics reveals the being of an eternal world which is informed by a fullness of being that entirely differs from a species of world or a species of being which is only partially realized at any given time and which can never exist with a fullness which would point to the realization of all properties that a given thing could possibly have.⁴³ It can be said, for instance, that, as human beings, we engage in different tasks (do different things) but, in doing different tasks, normally, we cannot all do them at the same time, simultaneously. Our consciousness varies as we move from one preoccupation to another or one task to another and, at the same time too, in the context of our lives and our self-reflection, we know too that we are not always conscious. Sometimes we are awake and, at other times, we are awake. The variability that we experience points to a certain lack of fullness which exists with respect to the kind of being that we have. However, on the other hand, in a way which points to the existence of a different kind of being (a different kind of reality), we notice that it is always true that, in adding the angles of a triangle, the sum is always 360 degrees. All the properties of a triangle are given at once. Certain kinds of being are not in any way lacking in being or reality and so, through the experience that we have of ourselves

⁴³Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, pp. 74-75.

engaged in mathematical reasoning and by apprehending the kind of world that comes to us through our mathematical reasoning, we can discover and appreciate the powers of our human reason as this reasoning exists in itself (with a degree of autonomy which belongs to it) and, at the same time, we can advert to the limitations of our sense perception and the kind of activity which belongs to us in our acts of human sensing.

(3) The world of the Senses refers to an imperfectly existing world that is unreal because it is constantly changing (constantly in a condition of flux; hence hard to determine or “pin down,” indeterminate). It exists in a way which presents shadows or pale images of reality to us since we cannot pretend that such a thing truly is but only that it is constantly shifting and becoming, being always other than being because existing within a condition of becoming. As existing (for want of a better predicate), it exists more as non-being than as being. In one sense, as referring to a locus or place, it is the “source of change, multiplicity, and imperfection,”⁴⁴ although, on the other hand, for an true understanding of change, instead of arguing that causes actively determine effects as these exist passively within the world of our sensing experience (“prior causes lead to later effects”),⁴⁵ the priority of Forms or Ideas and the participation of all lesser things within the being of these Forms or Ideas explains why change within our sensible world can be explained through a species of attraction which is exerted by the perfection or the goodness of transcendent Forms or Ideas.⁴⁶ These draw the lesser being of things toward themselves in a way which enhances the being of these lesser things, adding to the being of these lesser things, giving to these lesser beings an intelligibility or a reality that, otherwise, they would not have had. The kind of openness which exists within the being of lesser things accordingly points to a species of causality which exists in a species of understanding in Plato's understanding of the world: transcendent, final causes point to a kind of orientation which can exist within the being of things as, with respect to the perfection of a given thing's existence, this same perfection or this same existence can receive additional attributes and qualities that can only add to the perfection which a given thing already enjoys. As this is best demonstrated for us if we should refer to the kind of existence which belongs to us as human beings: when, as human beings, we attend to the being of moral qualities and attributes which exist as transcendent Forms or Ideas, we should be changed (we can be changed) by them: by that which we have come to understand and know and so, on the basis of this kind of change, we can begin to move from an initial kind of human existence toward a higher form of human existence: a way of living which is more intelligent, wise, and good.

Knowledge of this realm of sensible things *qua* sensible things is not really possible for us because they are sensible or, in other words, from the context of another point of view which can be seen to exist as a complementary point of view: “all [that] there is to know about the physical or natural world is known to us [only] by perception.”⁴⁷ The givenness or the phenomena of the physical, natural world is given to us directly, on its own terms, to the degree that it is perceptible to us (to the degree that it can be perceived by us) and so it is directly knowable only by way of our various acts of human sensing. Hence, in Plato's judgment, as this is expressed in some of his texts, that which is simply or merely given to us through the acts of perception which exist in our acts of sensing is to be classified not as knowledge, not as true knowledge, but as a species of apprehension which exists as opinion or as belief

44Sullivan, *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 44.

45Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 37.

46Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 37.

47Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, p. 70.

(*doxa* in Plato's terminology).⁴⁸ To the degree then that, in our sensible experience, everything is constantly changing or shifting, to the same degree then, the direct knowledge that we have of these shifts in our acts of sensing is to be correlated with ongoing occurring changes which must always exist in the kind of apprehensions that we are having and which exists whenever we think about the role of opinion or belief as this exists within human cognition and the special status which properly belongs to that which exists as opinion or belief.

In conclusion thus, as we attend to the later dialogues of Plato, although these three different levels are all distinct from each other, at the same time too, in some way, they are all related to each other through the idea or the principle of participation which somehow points to how the sensible world participates in the higher world of ideas.⁴⁹ No absolute gulf exists. Forms exist in a transcendent way if we should speak about their purity, or their absoluteness, or if we should speak about the absence of any kind of defect. Forms perfectly exist if we can see them as products or as terms that belong to our acts of understanding, proceeding from our acts of understanding. A form must exist in a given kind of way and in no other kind of way if it is to exist with an absoluteness and a perfection which transcends the being of material conditions. In this sense then, we can refer to Ideas or Forms in their ideality. They exist as ideals. They exist as final causes or as objectives for us in our human actions and, in this, they exist as norms or as standards by which we can judge the wisdom and the goodness of our human actions, determining either their value or their lack of value. Proximate or approximate forms that exist within things as imperfect embodiments of form can be compared with forms which exist in a disembodied, perfect way (hence, forms which exist in an absolute and perfect manner). The roundness of a circle is not the roundness of a wheel despite the similarity or the suggestiveness of that which exists as the roundness of a wheel.

For this reason thus, we can understand why, in Plato, in an approximate or in an imperfect sense, forms also exist within matter. Forms exist within matter in a way which recalls the earlier teaching of the Pythagoreans and in a way which also anticipates the later more explicit teaching of Aristotle and others of his school who, in their own way, all hold that the transcendence of the forms was not to be understood in a way which would take away from the reality of their immanence within concretely existing things: i.e., their existence within material conditions and circumstances. To forms belongs a transcendence (a stability) that is not affected by the givenness or the circumstances of material conditions nor by any changes which can occur among varying sets of material conditions (despite the immanence of forms to the degree that they are found to exist within changing material conditions and as, by our acts of abstractive understanding, we determine or we understand these forms by detaching material conditions from the being of the relevant forms which, to some extent, exist within these same conditions). In the teaching that we have from Plato about the reality of participation, no teaching is given which can explain or talk about how this participation exists (how precisely it occurs) or how it can be known or articulated in a way which knows about distinctions and a larger number of distinctions than that which had been known through the kind of analysis which Plato uses and which he had expressed in various places within the corpus of his surviving writings.

Plato's political philosophy

Plato's *The Republic*, allegedly his most important dialogue, deals with the essential relation which

⁴⁸Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, p. 69.

⁴⁹Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, pp. 70-72.

exists between public and private ethics, Justice being the regulating principle of ethics and politics that one must desire for its own sake. Given that for Plato, the state is the individual writ large, the finality or the purpose of the state resides in the perfection of its individual citizens and visa versa. Good politics is necessary for ethics while the good state cannot function without good citizens. In its first pages, Plato introduces the myth of the ring of Gyges to ask how we would stand with Justice in the face of temptation: as a metaphor, this "ring" is used to illustrate the objective value of Justice which does not depend on whether or not a human subject is invisible. In answering this question, the *Republic*, in its approach to morality, looks for a metaphysics of stability.

Summarizing the 9 books of the *Republic*: Book 1 opens by asking what Justice is where, since no one seems to know what it is, everything is thus bad in Athens. Book 2 searches for the real nature of Justice: despite all temptations and fears of punishment, should we stick to an abstract principle of Justice? In arguing for the absolute good of Justice, Plato claims that a connection exists between the ethical problem of happiness and the problem of following the unchangeable Idea of what is Justice. As Socrates had done, Plato argues that happiness results from following the objective truth and not from meeting pragmatic needs. In describing Justice, using Greek medical science as a model, Plato draws a parallelism between the tripartite structure of the ideal state and man's tripartite physical and psychic nature, public and private morality being closely connected.

Body	Soul	Virtue	State
head	reason=intellectual life	wisdom	rulers=philosophers
chest	will=higher, spirited emotions that are the source of actions	courage	auxiliaries=soldiers
abdomen	appetite=lower, animal desires	temperance	laborers, artisans (who can use money, own property, and wear decorations in moderation)

Man is ethical or virtuous when the lower desires are subordinated to the higher emotions and when the emotions are subordinated to the mind or *nous*, man's physical structure being made up of the corresponding levels or organs of stomach, heart, and head. Such a view indicates that Plato belongs to the intellectualist tradition in philosophy as this was chiefly founded by Socrates who believed that one would be good by knowing the good although Plato was not as one-sided or as simplistic as Socrates given his belief in the subordination of one part to another.

Books 2 to 5a examines the structure of the ideal state (the first utopia) without referring to who should rule the state. For Plato, like the old Hindu caste system and its division into priest, warrior, and laborer castes, the ideal state similarly consists of the same 3 classes that are to be correlated with man's appetites, courage, and reason: the lower class of artisans (the masses or *hoi polloi*) who work to provide the material necessities of life; the Guardians (or soldiers) who defend the city and provide for its order; and the rulers or elite guardians who must be philosophers: people with knowledge who possess a sound mind. The soldiers and rulers who understand the corrupting effects of greed will live an austere way of life, embracing a form of absolute communism: sleeping and eating together; owning

no property; receiving no salary; and having sexual relations on a pre-arranged schedule with partners who are shared by all.⁵⁰ Beyond musicians and singers, most artists will be excluded from the ideal state for 4 reasons:⁵¹ (1) ontological: since art deals with images (the lowest rung in the "Simile of the Line"), art is an imitation of an imitation of an imitation: it is "thrice removed from the throne"; (2) epistemological: the artist is at the conjectural stage (he knows nothing but claims to know something); (3) aesthetical: art expresses itself in sensual images (it distracts us from Beauty itself which is purely spiritual); and (4) moral: art is created by and appeals to the appetitive side of the soul (it is either erotic or violent, or it is both: hence, it incites us to anarchy; even Homer must be censored). Philosophy must take over the role that was previously played by art. If there is order and a harmony of the parts of the soul with the parts of the city with everything in its place, Justice will prevail since Justice exists as harmony, Justice being the sovereign moral value that cares for harmony (which sense still exists within our modern notion of justice with its emphasis on everything having its proper place in society). In the end, public and private morality both depend on one and the same wisdom. However, in a non-ideal world, the better type of political order combines monarchy with democracy in a rule of One and the Many.

Books 5a to 7 discuss the education of the ruler. Key is the claim that who should rule is he who knows, sees, and contemplates: he should rule who is the political aristocrat, the philosopher-king. The philosopher has a duty to society: he must study and train himself by studying the other sciences like mathematics in order to be convinced of the objective character of moral values; when people live by the scheme of objective values, the state will be organized where what had happened to Socrates will not happen again to someone else. While Plato presented the doctrine of the Philosopher-King as an anecdote, he later came to hold it less rigorously given how bad things in Athens had become.

That a philosopher is laughed at shows how the philosopher is always an object of mockery (perhaps reflecting Plato's difficult experience in Sicily). However, at the same time too, it illustrates Plato's doctrine of the Philosopher-King. When the man who has seen the light is killed by his fellow prisoners, Plato clearly alludes to the death of Socrates. The dialectic of neoplatonism will differ on this point of a return since it lacks the descending 3rd step, Plato's 3rd step being essential for his political ethics because one must return to the City to bring the Forms to it in order to help the city's citizens. We recall or simply indicate here that Plato came to philosophy through politics since, within politics, a firm link joins public and private morality because the goal of a sound political system is the virtue of its individual citizens while the virtue of the citizens is to make a good state: man can only live a good life within a good community since a well organized state inspires citizens to live a good life. Hence, a loose connection exists between the two states given a cohesion between Plato's metaphysical system and his ethical system: from knowing and living an ethical life, good ethics in turn finds good political life (and its possible reform and renewal). With Plato, one needs to know his metaphysics in order to grasp his ethics while, with Kant, one needs to know his ethics before knowing his metaphysical system (cf. Kant's *The Metaphysics of Morality*).

Book 8 onwards returns to the actual situation of the need for philosopher-kings. Where book 8 deals with mob psychology, he goes on to discuss the problem of Justice in relation to happiness and, at the end, he discusses the fate of the soul in the afterlife and so affirms the soul's immortality.

⁵⁰Palmer, *Looking at Philosophy*, p. 71.

⁵¹Palmer, *Looking at Philosophy*, p. 71-72.

Plato and Natural Law

In the surviving texts that we have from Plato, a teaching about the being and nature of natural law is not explicitly given although, in two texts, for the first time, Plato's Greek refers to "natural law" in words which work with the designation of it which exists as *nomos tēs phuseōs*.⁵² In the *Gorgias*, Callicles, a Sophist philosopher, refers to "natural law": he speaks about men who only pursue their own desires and self-interest where Plato has Callicles say that, in doing so, such men "follow nature – the nature of right – in acting thus; yes, on my soul, and follow the law of nature."⁵³

However, in Plato's rendering of these words, a particle is introduced in a way which points to the newness and the strangeness of this expression: a new concept which exists for us as a complex concept because, for the first time, it combines the formerly disparate, simple concepts of *nomos* and *physis*. Hence, how or why it should be regarded as a paradox that Plato has constructed.⁵⁴ Two contraries are brought together into a new union of the two which points to a species of contradictory meaning which suggests that, perhaps also within the human order of things, in conjunction or beyond the regularities which exist within the order of physical nature, there could also exist regularities within the human order of things.⁵⁵ Physical and human regularities both exist in a way which can be known by us if we should engage in inquiries that are best suited to their proper discovery. In the context of the discussion at hand within the *Gorgias*, Gorgias, who is also a Sophist philosopher, is distinguishing between events which occur "by the decrees of necessity" and other events which occur either "by the plans of chance" or "by the plans of the gods."⁵⁶ If the gods were seen to intervene in human affairs in an essentially arbitrary, happenstance fashion, then the plans of chance and the plans of the gods would not differ from each other. In the contrast which accordingly exists between necessity and chance, necessity is to be associated with the workings of nature in a manner which should point to how, in some way, recurrent normative patterns exist within a world which is not subject to our human control (the greater, naturally existing world of external nature) but, as we have been noting, we cannot live wisely and well as human beings if we ignore how these patterns serve as a basis of directives or precepts for how we can live in a better proper way: indicating in some way what would be good for us to do or avoid and what would also be not good for us to do or avoid.

More specifically, in the particular context of the *Gorgias*, in a manner which recalls or which points to the similar teaching and beliefs of Thucydides as this comes to us in the context of another dialogue (from the text of Plato's *Republic*), in a technical manner, through the mouth of Callicles, as we have already noticed to some extent in the language which is used by Callicles, Plato speaks about "natural law" in a way which joins it to an alleged right which we have as willing human beings: a right which exists as the "right of the stronger," a right which says that "might is right." It would seem thus, given how this thesis is presented, that the legitimacy of this right is grounded in the meaning and the being

⁵²Plato, *Gorgias* 483e, as cited by V. Bradley Lewis, "Platonic Philosophy and Natural Law," <http://www.nlnrac.org/classical/plato> (accessed October 4, 2016), p. 1, n. 4. Other sources also refer to the *Timaeus* 83e although, in the context of the *Timaeus*, *nomos tēs phuseōs* refers to the normal and the natural functioning of the human body. Cf. Koester, "Concept of Natural Law," *Religions in Antiquity*, p. 523; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_law#Plato (accessed October 4, 2016).

⁵³Plato, *Gorgias* 482c-483e, as cited by Burns, *Aristotle and Natural Law*, p. 146.

⁵⁴Koester, "Concept of Natural Law," *Religions in Antiquity*, p. 523.

⁵⁵Burns, *Aristotle and Natural Law*, p. 141.

⁵⁶Plato, *Gorgias* 483e, as cited by Grant, *Miracle and Natural Law*, p. 20.

of a “natural law” (a necessity which exists within nature itself since, within the being of the physical world which surrounds us, it would seem to be the case that stronger creatures always prevail over weaker creatures: “mice are eaten by hawks”). Appositely: the appeal that is made to nature “demonstrates that 'it is *right* that the better man should prevail over the worse and the stronger over the weaker',”⁵⁷ although, in the context of other dialogues and on the basis of his own point of view, in the *Protagoras*, for instance, Plato derives this right of the stronger not from the purported existence of any necessities which exist within the natural world of existing things but from the import and the legislation of some of our conventional human laws since, in his judgment, this type of right cannot be derived from the kind of being which is to be properly found within the order of external nature (from anything which exists in a manner which is allegedly “according to nature” as something which is beyond or which is outside of the reach of our human control).⁵⁸

According to the kind of understanding which we can find in Plato and according to the kind of language which we can use to speak about this understanding, it is to be admitted about biological urges and imperatives that they exert an influence on us in the conduct of our human affairs. No one can deny this. Plato does not deny this. However, this influence is quite other, it differs from the kind of imperative and the influence that is cast for us by our acts of understanding and judgment when our apprehensions are directed toward an awareness of realities which exist as manifestations of truth, goodness, justice, and beauty. Apprehensions of beauty, in having a sensible base, by appealing to our acts of sense perception, can suggest or they can point us toward apprehensions of truth, goodness, and justice which exist at a higher level. While some natural laws exist as laws which resemble the kind of law which exists with respect to the being of material or mechanical processes, other natural laws also exist (they can be found) if, with Plato, we should attend to the being of immaterial realities and to the order of constitution which belongs to these realities. To attend to a critical understanding and a knowledge of our human behavior and how we are to live and understand as human beings, another kind of inquiry is needed if we are to know about the being of precepts, norms, and laws that are also natural since, as *natural*, we cannot change them in a manner that would be essentially arbitrary (as we would want them to be). We cannot change them in a manner would suit the orientation and objectives of each of us in the pursuit of our personal desires and interests although, admittedly, in his language, in the use of his words, Plato does not explicitly refer to “natural laws” or “laws of nature” which refer to the being of immaterial realities. It is only by a kind of inference thus that we can suppose that this type of language is possibly applicable and suited to the kind of meaning that Plato is attempting to understand and express in the larger context of his analysis.

In parenthesis, apart from questions that have to do with the being of human moral issues, in the *Timaeus*, “natural law” exists within a context of meaning which only refers to the difference between health and disease. Disease or lack of health is said to be “contrary to the laws of nature.”⁵⁹ In Plato's reference to “natural law” or the “way of nature,” a contradiction is alluded to since good health, as the absence of disease, is given to us (it would be given to us) if nothing disrupts the proper functioning of our bodily processes.⁶⁰ What should be in terms of the laws of nature, in fact, already is in the context of present good health which is spoken about and defined in terms which refer to the proper functioning of our bodily processes.

⁵⁷Burns, *Aristotle and Natural Law*, p. 147, citing Plato, *Gorgias* 483b-e.

⁵⁸Plato, *Gorgias* 483e, as cited by Grant, *Miracle and Natural Law*, p. 20.

⁵⁹Plato, *Timaeus*, 83e, as cited by Grant, *Miracle and Natural Law*, p. 20.

⁶⁰Plato, *Timaeus*, 83e.

As regards the meaning of *natural* as this applies to Plato's understanding of human affairs, elsewhere, in other texts, according to the more traditional form of usage which Plato has inherited from others in the context of his philosophical reflection, as we have been noting, Plato refers to things that are simply “natural” (*phusei*) or to things that are simply “according to nature” (*kata phusin*), these references accordingly suggesting to us that Plato was not unfamiliar with the earlier Sophist notion of the relation which exists between nature and convention. Certain things exist *by nature*. Other things exist *by convention*. According to the kind of choice which exists within the conventional human order of things, things do not have to be in the way they happen to be (according to the way that they have been made as us as willing human agents). In the kind of criticism that is given by Plato through the mediation of his Socratic dialogues, the enacted laws of city states should not be seen to be necessarily just or, in some sense, as ultimately final.⁶¹ They can be disregarded to the degree that they are lacking in the reasonableness and the rationality which should belong to them and so, by means of this distinction, by a kind of application, to the degree that our human behavior is at times irrational and so “contrary to nature” and at other times rational and so “according to nature,” similarly, in the same way, our conventional man-made laws can be distinguished from laws which can be said to exist at a higher level, existing *by nature*, because they are grounded in the being of truths or realities that no one can ever truly doubt or question. On the basis of an understanding and a knowledge of metaphysics, we can say that that which is essentially just and good and temperate is something which exists *by nature* (the just as just, the good as good, the temperate as temperate).⁶² So substantive are the being of these realities is that, as a consequence, they are bereft of the relativity which is always to be associated with the possibility of caprice which can exist in our human willing and judgment (the caprice which can exist in human choice as human choice, given the nature of choice as choice when, in any given situation, option A can be chosen instead of option B even if no reason exists for why A should be selected instead of B).

Statutory laws, positive laws, or customary laws exist at a lower level and so, in agreement with Sophist objections and concerns, conventional laws can be subjected to criticism in a way that could lead to either their revision or, more radically, to their rejection and replacement. As Plato observes, for instance, in the *Laws*: “laws which are not established for the good of the whole state are bogus laws.”⁶³ They can be altered and put aside on the basis of higher principles which are grounded in the being of transcendentally existing reasons which exist with a reality which refers to the being of transcendental ideas or the being of transcendental forms. As noted earlier, Plato speaks about ideas; Aristotle, forms. Laws are only truly laws if they can participate or belong to the nature, the Form, or the Idea of law as law: law as it exists as law or law as transcendent law, law in terms of what it is supposed to be and how it is supposed to exist as a truly binding norm.

Hence, instead of a sharp distinction which would continue to exist between the being of “nature” and the being of “law,” in the context of Plato's dialectical analysis, “nature” and “law” can be brought together in a way which points to a form of interaction. They can be thought together as two principles of order, both serving to effect or to create a new, improved human order of things. If the nature of law and the nature of justice are both adequately understood (their meanings point to each other), if their ideality and reality is both grasped and understood (the reality comes from the ideality), then law,

⁶¹Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics*, pp. 206-207.

⁶²Plato, *Republic*, 501b, as cited by Grant, *Miracle and Natural Law*, p. 5.

⁶³Plato, *Laws*, 4, 715.

justice, and nature would exist together or we could say that they all exist together. In the subsequent making of any laws in our human societies, all the enacted laws should reflect the abiding nature of that which exists essentially as the meaning and being of law and justice. From the meaning and essence of law, from the meaning and essence of justice (natural justice as opposed conventional justice points to the being of natural law and not conventional law), from all this, we would have the being or the existence of laws which would truly exist as just or righteous laws (hence, apart from any alterations or changes that, at will, we could possibly want to introduce and to effect). These laws would exist for the sake of the common good of all persons who would happen to live within a particular society.⁶⁴ Through the order which they would introduce, they would reflect an order of things which cannot change or pass away (the being of truth and the goodness of virtue within the order of right living) and, at the same time too, they would make for the good kind of government and administration which should exist for the life and the well being (the flourishing) of our various public institutions. Within the ups and downs which exist within the human order of things, recurrent patterns of behavior can be discovered in a way which should point to the being of realities that would transcend the matter and the business of our current human practice and so, from a knowledge of these realities, new recurrent patterns of behavior could be possibly known: patterns of activity which we could bring into the being of our personal and social operations in a way which would change the functioning of a given political order, creating an order which had not existed before, or changing a political order in a way which would add to its intelligibility, its goodness and its fruitfulness. The absence of convention points to the being of transcendent dimensions and, as a consequence, from this, an understanding of law and justice which would point to its cosmic aspects: a notion of natural law that is not subject to any kind of human change that we would want to make (it is natural and not artificial) and yet, at the same time, a notion of natural law which is germane to the human order of things, properly belonging to the human order of things. It applies to how we are to live within the human order of things without being something which exists as a function of this same order. If, by one kind of inquiry, we can know about the existence of natural laws that are physical, chemical, or biological, by another kind of inquiry, we can know about the existence of natural laws that are appropriately social and human.

To indicate the identity of these higher principles (some of these higher principles) by referring to points and details that can be derived from the general contours of Plato's philosophy (for purposes of information and illustration), the Idea or the Form of the Good is to be regarded, it exists as the highest principle within the order of existing things that comprises the whole of the universe. In Plato's words, it exists as "the brightest thing that is."⁶⁵ It is the cause of all things within the world and, when it is seen and known by us, to the degree that it can be seen and known by us, it will lead us to act more wisely in the conduct of their lives and in any decisions that would determine the laws of our respective political states.⁶⁶ In Plato's *Republic*, simply put thus, in words that Plato uses: an ideal state is described in terms which speak about "a whole city [that is] established according to nature."⁶⁷ The nature refers to that which is entirely reasonable and rational with respect to the being of the first principles of a rational political philosophy where, in fact, within any given human context, whether within a political philosophy or outside of it, if something is to truly and fully exist in the manner which should belong to it, it must exist in a manner which is determined by the being of rational considerations which always exist in an objectively unchanging, eternal way. These are removed or

⁶⁴Rommen, *Natural Law*, p. 13.

⁶⁵Plato, *Republic*, 518c-d.

⁶⁶Plato, *Republic*, 517b-d; 540a.

⁶⁷Plato, *Republic*, 428e.

they are detached (they are excluded) from the being of any kind of arbitrary human change that could possibly come from persons who are devoid of the kind of understanding and insight which is needed by us if we are to move, firstly, toward a theoretical or a metaphysical understanding of Natures, Forms, or Ideas which exist in their own right as substantive realities and then, from there, secondly, move toward an understanding which belongs to the practice of our human ethics and all the decisions which are needed by way of implementation if we are to move from the order of knowing which exists in our acts of cognition toward the order of doing and execution which would occur in the wake of our prior acts of understanding and cognition. In Plato, right knowledge always leads us toward the kind of performance which exists in right actions.

in conclusion

A number of points can be made with respect to a number of consequences (or allegedly the “fallout”) that has resulted and which has emerged for us within the subsequent history of reflection and thought within the kind of work which belongs to philosophy: within (1) the philosophy of ethics, (2) the philosophy of science, and (3) the philosophy of religion, not excluding however how (4) Plato's notion of beauty or how his notion of the Beautiful has had a fructifying influence as a possible, initial point of entry (serving, in other words, as a point of departure) for anyone who could be begin to have an interest in the value of asking philosophical questions: pursuing personal studies and reflections that could lead into higher reflections as these exist within philosophy and the kind of manifestation which exists within culture. By way of an abbreviated discussion which points to the possible truth of a judgment which comes to us originally from A. N. Whitehead and which says that the subsequent history of thought in western philosophy is to be regarded as a footnote that has been appended to the texts of Plato's philosophy,⁶⁸ evidencing the kind of causality or the kind of stimulus that has always belonged to the accumulation of insights and oversights that we find in Plato's thought:

First, with respect to ethical questions and how we should live a truly good life, since Plato's aspirations and philosophy is entirely directed toward a knowledge of stable, fundamental, and final realities (from a knowledge of metaphysical realities, one best moves toward a knowledge of moral realities), his philosophy has been described as a study of how we are to die well: how we are, in fact, to cross over from the being of one world to the being of another world *within the context of our present life* prior to any kind of physical death which would inevitably come to us as human beings at the conclusion of our life on earth.⁶⁹ In referring to Socrates and by means of the person and figure of Socrates, Plato's philosophy has sought to teach us how we are to undergo a species of radical change within ourselves (a change which exists as a moral and as an intellectual species of conversion that can be given to us within the context of our current life) since, if we are philosophical, if we are truly philosophical in how we think and live, then, even if and as we die within ourselves by way of a change of self which occurs in how we exist and think as human beings, through this type of death, we will achieve a true kind of morality as, gradually and increasingly, our souls are joined and assimilated to the being a greater, primary world from which we have all originally emerged and come from. As our human souls remember this primary world through an interior process of recollection, we will be moved and stirred by an inner yearning and seeking that soon wells up from within ourselves: a desiring and appetite that wants to return to the world of our origins through an *eros* which can be

⁶⁸Koestler, *Sleepwalkers*, p. 55.

⁶⁹Stratford Caldecott, *Not As the World Gives The Way of Creative Justice* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2014), p. 30; *Beauty for Truth's Sake*, p. 21.

identified as a species of love. Death then, when it comes, comes and exists as a liberation as, now, we are separated and disjoined from our mortal bodies in a manner which is akin to the birth of philosophy within our souls (within our rational life) as this occurs and as it is achieved through any kind of growth in knowledge that can come to us whenever we engage and enter into a form of self-liberation which properly belongs to us as human beings through the kind of philosophical activity which belongs to us: as we exercise the powers of our rational human souls in a manner that tends toward the actuation of our human reason as this is given to us by way of a reminiscence which remembers truths and realities that had been previously known, truths or realities that we have long since forgotten but which can now be brought back and put into a form of conscious awareness (an awareness which has now become explicit). As a general maxim thus: to know any kind of truth is always to liberate ourselves as we discover the reality of our human spirit and the kind of transcendence which properly belongs to our spirit. Despite the difficulties, we can more easily understand and work with the transcendence of our human spirit than with that which exists and which is given to us as an outer, external world which exists in a shadowy kind of way because, in its being, it is something which is none too reliable, steady, or constant.

Second, with respect to the kind of knowledge which properly belongs to the nature of scientific activity as a distinct species or form of cognition, in Plato's philosophy of science, a number of points presage or we can say that they suggest an understanding of science that belongs to the extent of our current understanding. Three points stand out. (1) First, if we are to move toward any kind of scientific understanding, we must prescind or we must move away from the kind of knowledge that belongs to our acts of human sensing. A real distinction exists between the direct objects of our human experience and the direct objects of our understanding and, if we are to understand the objects of our human sensing, we must move into a species of cogitation activity that moves to another set of objects and properties. (2) Second, an apprehension of the being of intellectual objects and properties is greatly helped if, by means of mathematics and through the use of mathematics, these objects or properties are given a form of denotation that is grounded in the use of mathematical symbols. Numbers express quantities and, as the same time too, they can indicate where proportions exist as differing variables are related to each other in ways which point to the being of a greater scheme of things that can be known and mapped out more easily if mathematics is used as a species of scientific tool. So much of this goes with so much of that. Between, say, x and y , a relation exists which corresponds or which resembles a second relation which exists, say, between m and n . Mathematical equations introduce an order of things into the world of our ordinary experience in a manner that cannot be rendered if we continue to rely on a kind of knowing that is more closely linked to our acts and data of sense than the kind of knowing that also belongs to us in our human reasoning and the kind of distancing that can effected if, through our acts of inquiry, we move from the acts and data of sense toward the acts and data of our understanding. The abstractness of mathematics introduces a greater degree of abstractness into the conduct of our scientific inquiry than would be the case if we should think about the possible objects of our understanding in ways that would want to limit the kind or form of denotation to a symbolism that is more closely related to the language of our ordinary speech than to the technical kind of language and denotation which belongs to the kinds of procedure which exist within mathematics. (3) Third, in its truthfulness, the kind of understanding which exists in science is best described as probable and not as certain. In Plato's language, in the *Timaeus*, we refer to how a given understanding of things would exist as a "likely story."⁷⁰ As a consequence of probability and because of judgments which are grounded in the sense and rationality of probability, a provisional

⁷⁰Meynell, *Redirecting Philosophy*, p. 248, citing Plato, the *Timaeus*.

understanding of things, as this exists within science, is not to be confused with the kind of provision or the kind of contingency which exists whenever opinions or beliefs are espoused in a manner that is divorced from the presence of any kind of evidence. Truths which are known through apprehensions of evidence exist more surely or with a greater degree of stability and credibility than any claims or assertions that are made in a manner that is bereft of any kind of evidence or proof.

Third, with respect to how Plato exists as a philosopher of religion, since philosophy in the Platonic tradition requires a conversion of the whole human self that is not limited to only our acts of thinking and reasoning, Plato should not be viewed as, strictly speaking, a rationalist but as something or as someone who was more than that: existing as a spiritual or as a spiritualist type of thinker. Since Plato's philosophy involves more than having a rational grasp of reality (where this reality is understood to refer to the being of an externally existing world), his thought requires elements of estrangement from the world of our ordinary experience and so, in the kind of distancing which is needed in our thinking and reasoning, our present life is turned or it becomes a kind of preparation or a function of some kind of higher form of existence, an aspect that was later noticed and picked up by early Christian theologians who tried to incorporate Plato's philosophy and thought into the newly emerging being of a Christian Catholic theology. Persons like St. Augustine (and others) turned to both Plato and Plotinus in the declining days of the Roman Empire in order to escape or to look toward other sources of meaning in ways that could enhance the possibility of our human salvation and, in a related way, also increase or add to the extent of our human understanding. Hence, within this context, a struggle soon ensued between a Jewish conception of man and a Platonic conception of man. How to combine the two together? Where Plato believed that our current human life was not as it seemed to appear and look and that, as messengers and helpers, we must go back down into the cave of mortal human existence in order to convince and help our fellow human beings, in the Platonic philosophy of **Plotinus**, instead of reaching out to our fellow man, we must seek to be free of the material order of things where these impinge or influence us in how we live and think. Where in Plato, a basis exists for having legitimate political desires and interests, in Plotinus a break or a total severance from the contemporary order of things which exists within our world is to be encouraged and esteemed. In a more radical kind of way, one would try to live apart from other human beings, separately from the being of other persons. Better to live the life of a hermit.

Fourth and lastly, in Plato's notion of the Beautiful or in his notion of beauty, a foundation is given or, better still, a foundation is laid for subsequent reflections that would try to distinguish that which is beautiful or the Beautiful as a reality that exists on par (comparably) with the Good and the True, that which is good and that which is true. If Truth exists as a transcendental (it cuts across the being of all cultural differences) and if Good also exists as a transcendental (it also transcends the being of all cultural differences), cannot the same thing be said about the being or notion of Beauty and any instances or manifestations of beauty? If truth and goodness inform each other (each is the other), why not beauty? Is not the good, beautiful and is not truth, beautiful also? In fact, with further reflection, if truth is grasped by understanding minds as an intelligible understood entity (it is not informed by the presence of any material determinations), and if good is understood as a practicable deed or action that is to be brought into a concrete form of existence within the being of spatial and temporal conditions, then, given the kind of cognition which belongs to us as human beings, our acts of sense constantly interacting with our acts of understanding, can experiences of beauty serve as the best point of entry for us if we are to move toward other apprehensions which know about the being of truths and yet other apprehensions which know about the goodness of different things? In other words, apprehensions of beauty exist in a manner which is closer or more adjacent to us in the kind of knowing which exists for

us in our various acts of human sensing. In our human lives, we sense before we understand. Our acts of human sensing exist before we begin to move toward our later acts of understanding. One type of act precedes the other and, so, this difference accordingly points to a kind of priority which can be ascribed if, with Plato in his *Symposium*, we should refer to the Idea or the Form of Beauty as the chief of all the forms, governing all else in the hierarchy of different forms and ideas. Pedagogically or cognitively, we understand the kind of supremacy which should be ascribed to the role and the function of Beauty although, from a point of view which attends to the primacy of a metaphysical perspective, we can understand why Truth can be regarded as the chief of all forms since from the primacy of understanding and through our apprehensions of differing truths, we can then move toward apprehensions which can know about realizations of being that are possible but which can only be brought into being through externalizing actions which move from the kind of order and acts which belong to our human cognition toward another order that is constituted by the doing of actions that are other than those which belong to the performance or the actuality of our human cognition. While Plato does not speak (in so many words) about the primacy of the Idea or Form of Truth (he speaks about the primacy of the Beautiful and, elsewhere, about the primacy of the Good), we can wonder and perhaps suppose, reading his texts and then arguing that, in the meaning of Plato's thought, the primacy of Truth within the order of Ideas is to be regarded as a forgone conclusion. Absent the primacy and, from this, absent the being of any kind of goodness. In a tradition of thought that comes to us from Socrates and which dominated the subsequent history of western philosophy until into the life and times of St. Thomas Aquinas in 13th Century: from our knowing, comes our willing, our doing. Our acts of willing and doing are ruled by our acts of understanding and knowing. We do what we know.