

Three Dimensions of Being in Plato and the Rationally Structured Domain of Becoming

Abstract

Plato's metaphysics identifies **three fundamental oppositional dimensions of being** – (1) **Active vs. Passive**, (2) **Coming-to-be vs. Ceasing-to-be**, and (3) **Visible vs. Invisible** – which jointly structure an *intermediate realm of becoming* governed by reason (*voũç*). This study finds that Plato affirms these dimensions as genuine **ontological categories**, not mere epistemic or linguistic distinctions. Close readings of the *Theaetetus* reveal that every perceptible event arises from an **active-passive interaction**, that all sensible qualities exist as transient states in **temporal coming-to-be and passing-away**, and that **visibility itself emerges** through a process (implying a realm of the *invisible* or not-yet-manifest) ¹ ². Plato explicitly rebukes the “uninitiated” who deny the reality of these categories ³, indicating their foundational status in his ontology. Moreover, in the *Timaeus* Plato depicts the cosmos as a **rationally ordered living entity**: the world-soul's structure (the Circle of the Same and the Circle of the Different) and the regulated motions of the heavens model a **structured field of becoming** that imitates eternal being in a temporal medium ⁴ ⁵. **Nous (Divine Intelligence)** oversees this domain, “persuading” the flux of Necessity toward order and goodness ⁶. Even Plato's mythology reinforces this triadic ontology: in the *Republic's* Myth of Er, the three Fates – **Lachesis (Past)**, **Clotho (Present)**, **Atropos (Future)** – orchestrate the spindle of Necessity, symbolically governing the cosmic rotations and the flow of time ⁷. Together, the textual and symbolic evidence supports the conclusion that Plato recognizes an ontologically real **middle realm** between changeless Being and chaotic non-being – a realm of *intelligible becoming* structured along the axes of activity, temporality, and perceptibility, and ruled by rational principles.

Introduction: Plato's Middle Realm of Intelligible Becoming

Does Plato's metaphysics allow for a structured realm of change governed by reason? Traditionally, Plato is seen as drawing a sharp contrast between eternal, unchanging Forms (true *Being*) and the fluctuating world of sensible things (mere appearance or *becoming*). However, the hypothesis explored here is that Plato delineates an intermediate ontological domain – a **rationally structured realm of becoming** – that is neither absolute eternal Being nor formless chaotic flux. In this realm, **things come-to-be and pass-away** in an orderly fashion, through the interplay of **active and passive factors**, and through a mix of **visible and invisible principles**. This domain is “in between” in that it partakes of intelligibility (order, *voũç*) while still being a world of change. Plato's own method of philosophical analysis, which often involves distinguishing fundamental opposites or principles, lays the groundwork for identifying these three dimensions as *axes of reality*.

Two passages from the *Theaetetus* serve as a prelude, illustrating Plato's commitment to the idea that raw experience must be structured by intellect to count as reality:

- **Theaetetus 152a-b (From Pathos to Conceptualized Experience)**: Socrates discusses a person shivering (*πρὸς ψῶντι*) in a cold wind. The mere feeling of being cold (a *pathos*) is not yet a determinate

reality “for the soul” until the mind applies the concept “cold” (ψυχρόν). In other words, *sensation alone is indeterminate* – it becomes *knowledge of something* only when **νοῦς organizes it by a concept** ³ ⁸. This indicates that for Plato “**what is**” **emerges at the interface of sensory affections and intellectual structure**, foreshadowing an intelligible ordering of experience.

- **Theaetetus 155e–156a (The “Uninitiated” and Ontological Denial):** Socrates pointedly asks Theaetetus to ensure no “uninitiated” are listening, and then defines the uninitiated as those “who believe in nothing but what they can grasp with their hands, and who deny the existence of actions (τὸ πράττεσθαι) and generation (τὸ γίνεσθαι) and **all that is invisible**” ³. Such people stubbornly refuse to acknowledge the reality of anything they *cannot* perceive tangibly. Socrates’ remark is telling: **Plato (through Socrates) clearly regards the realities of action, coming-to-be, and unseen things as crucial and true** – so much so that denying them is a mark of philosophical ignorance. This passage is an implicit affirmation that **Plato accepts these three categories** (active doing, temporal genesis, and invisibles) as *real features of being*. It also sets the stage for Plato’s positive account: the *initiated*, or true philosophers, **must recognize** the reality of change, causation, and the unseen in order to grasp the structure of reality.

With this background, we proceed to examine how Plato articulates each of the three dimensions of being and integrates them into a coherent metaphysical vision. The primary focus will be on key texts in the *Theaetetus* that explicitly discuss these oppositions, supplemented by the cosmological account of the *Timaeus* (which provides a grand image of structured becoming under νοῦς) and a brief look at the symbolic confirmation in the *Republic’s* Myth of Er.

I. Three Ontological Dimensions in the *Theaetetus*: Active/Passive, Becoming/Ceasing, Visible/Invisible

In the *Theaetetus*, during the discussion of Protagoras’ relativism and the Heracleitean flux theory (152–160d), Plato has Socrates introduce a nuanced account of how perception and change work. He identifies three pairs of oppositional concepts that are operating whenever we say something “comes to be” for a perceiver:

- **Active vs. Passive (Agent and Patient in Causation):** Plato acknowledges **two fundamental types of motion (κίνησις)** in the world: one that **acts** (ποιεῖν) and one that **is acted upon** (πάσχειν) ⁹. Every event of change involves an **active force and a passive recipient** in interaction. Socrates describes a “secret doctrine” of certain wise thinkers that “everything is motion” of two kinds, *active* and *passive*, whose “union and friction (τρίψις) ... beget offspring, twins together – the object of sense and the sense (perception) itself” ¹⁰ ¹¹. In other words, whenever we perceive (say, seeing a color or feeling warmth), there is an **active element (e.g. an object emitting or reflecting) and a passive element (the sense-organ receiving)** whose interaction produces a *phenomenon*. Crucially, Socrates does **not** refute this active/passive distinction; instead, he *uses* it to clarify how perception arises. A vivid example is given at 153e–154a: “*motion is the cause of that which passes for existence – namely becoming – whereas rest is the cause of destruction; for warmth or fire... is itself the offspring of movement and friction, and these two are forms of motion.*” ¹ ¹². Here **motion (activity)** is identified as the causal source of life and generation (fire/warmth being “the parent and preserver” of other things), whereas **rest (inactivity)** causes things to decay or cease. The **active vs. passive** dimension is thus treated as ontologically basic – every generation requires a cause and a patient. The active

element *never simply transfers its own static “quality”* to the patient; rather, each becomes something new through the interaction. As Socrates emphasizes, *the active element does not become abstract heat or whiteness, but becomes hot or white* in the encounter, **while the passive element (e.g. the eye or the perceiving subject) becomes a perceiver in that encounter** ¹³ ¹⁴. Both parties undergo a *becoming*: the agent comes to be *such as* X (hot, white, etc.), the patient comes to perceive X. This indicates that Plato sees causal interaction as a real ontological process that **constitutes the phenomena** – a view incompatible with Parmenidean denial of motion. For Plato, *activity and passivity are “axes” along which reality is structured*: nothing in the sensible world simply *is* by itself; things **exist for us through dynamic interactions** of agents and patients.

- **Coming-to-Be vs. Ceasing-to-Be (Reality in Flux and Temporal Process)**: The Heracleitean view that the objects of perception are always in flux is given a sympathetic exposition in the *Theaetetus*. While Plato ultimately insists on a stable ground for knowledge, he does not reject the reality of *becoming* and *perishing*; rather, he integrates it into his metaphysics. At 152d, Socrates (expressing the flux theorist’s doctrine) concludes that “nothing ever *is* one thing itself by itself,” but rather things “become” through relations ¹⁵. He underscores that all perceptible qualities are **states that arise and later vanish**. For example, when something becomes hot or white, it is undergoing γένεσις into a qualified state (πολὸν τι) rather than acquiring an eternal property ¹³. Similarly, the perceiver doesn’t acquire some immutable entity called “whiteness” – he simply *becomes white-seeing*, and the object *becomes white* at that time. This is a direct affirmation that **coming-to-be (γίγνεσθαι) and ceasing-to-be (φθορά)** are real processes in Plato’s ontology, not mere illusions. In 153e–154a, as noted, Socrates even appeals to empirical evidence that *life depends on continual motion and change*: exercise and bodily motions preserve health, while inactivity brings atrophy; intellectual activity (learning, practicing) preserves the soul’s excellence, while quiescence causes forgetting and decay ¹² ¹⁶. The **temporal dimension** of being – that things arise and pass in time – is thus taken as a given in the world of phenomena. Plato’s move is to **rationalize this flux**, not to deny it. In the *Theaetetus* 181–182, he distinguishes between *absolute flux* and *measured flux*: if everything were changing in every way at every moment, we couldn’t even speak of “white” or “hot” at all ¹⁷ ¹⁸. But in fact, we *can* speak of things becoming white or hot in a way that, for a time, holds steady enough to be identified. Thus, *coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be* are **structured processes** in Plato’s view – *Becoming* is always *becoming something (some form or order)*, and *Ceasing* is becoming something else or failing to maintain order. Far from being an “unreal” half-state, the realm of genesis and phthora is a necessary ontological level that Plato often calls the realm of “becoming” (γένεσις) in contrast to ungenerated “being” (οὐσία). What Plato adds is that this realm is *orderly* (not anarchic flux) insofar as it is **woven by causal interactions and oriented toward intelligible structure**.

- **Visible vs. Invisible (Sensible Appearance and Intelligible Reality)**: The distinction between the **visible** and the **invisible** runs deep in Plato’s metaphysics (e.g. the *Phaedo* contrasts the visible, changing body with the invisible, immortal soul). In the *Theaetetus*, the focus is on how *visibility itself* arises. Plato treats **“the visible” as an emergent attribute** – it comes about when the eye and a visible object interact. Socrates explains that before the eye encounters the object, “*vision was not in it*” (οὐκ ἔνῃν τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ τὸ ὁρᾶν) ². Only *through the meeting* of the eye’s power with the object’s output does the event of seeing occur; at that moment “the eye is filled with sight and becomes a seeing eye,” while the object “is saturated in whiteness and becomes... something white” ¹⁹. This wonderfully concrete image shows that **the capacity to see (and thus the realm of the visible) is not a static given** – it *develops in time* through a process. There is a **prior “invisible” state** (when the eye had the potential to see but wasn’t seeing, and the object’s color was unmanifest to that eye)

and a subsequent “visible” state (when seeing and seen emerge as twin facts). Plato, therefore, treats “visible” and “invisible” not just as *relative terms* (what is visible to one may be invisible to another) but as indicators of an **ontological divide**: *the sensible world of appearance versus the unseen factors and entities* that underlie or transcend appearance. In *Theaetetus* 155e, as we saw, the “uninitiated” deny **“all that is invisible”** ³ – which would include things like souls, Forms, abstract qualities, or even the causal powers themselves. Plato’s initiated philosophers, by contrast, accept that the **invisible realm is real**: for example, *activities* (which we infer from effects but do not see with eyes), *causal powers*, *mathematical forms*, and *the soul’s operations* are all unseen but genuine. In the very generation of a perception, the factors at play (e.g. the eye’s faculty, the object’s property) are initially **invisible** and only produce a visible outcome through interaction. This dimension also implies that **intelligible structure is “invisible”** – *logos* and *nous* work behind the scenes of appearances. The *Theaetetus* tacitly acknowledges this by requiring a conceptual ordering of sensory data (recall the cold wind example: the concept “cold” is not something visible, yet it’s necessary for the perception to be identified as cold). Thus, Plato’s ontology includes an invisible infrastructure (rational and causal principles) that *makes* the visible world what it is. The **Visible/Invisible** axis is not a mere epistemological distinction between what we happen to perceive or not; it corresponds to Plato’s two-world vision (the changing, sensible realm and the unchanging, intelligible realm). However, what the present analysis emphasizes is that Plato also posits a *relationship* between them: the invisible (intelligible, conceptual, causal) dimension actively informs and structures the visible appearances. This will become even clearer in the cosmology of the *Timaeus*.

In summary, the *Theaetetus* provides direct textual evidence that Plato affirms these three pairs of opposites as **real features of the world**. He does not treat change, interaction, or the unseen as illusory; on the contrary, he investigates *how* they contribute to what “appears to the soul as reality.” The distinctions are **metaphysically grounded** – motion and rest, change and stability, the sensible and the intelligible are fundamental ontological categories that must be accounted for in any complete description of “what is.” As Socrates ultimately suggests (*Theaet.* 186d–187a), knowledge itself will require acknowledging both the flux of perception and something stable that intellect can grasp – implying a two-level reality. The next step is to see *where* Plato situates these dimensions of being. That is, **in what “domain” do active/passive, temporal, and perceptual dualities operate?** The answer comes from Plato’s cosmology: these oppositions structure the **cosmos** – a living, rationally ordered *domain of becoming*.

II. The Structured Domain of Becoming: *Timaeus* and the Order of the Cosmos

Plato’s *Timaeus* offers a grand vision of the **cosmos as a living creature** that embodies the very structure we outlined: it is a realm of **becoming** (generated in time) but it is meticulously **ordered by reason**. This dialogue explicitly describes a **“third nature”** besides the realm of eternal Forms and the realm of chaotic matter – an intermediate reality often identified with the *World Soul* or the structured universe itself. In the creation myth told by Timaeus, we see how the three dimensions (active/passive, coming-to-be, visible/invisible) are built into the world’s design:

- **Rational Creation and the Imposition of Order:** Plato’s Demiurge (divine Craftsman) finds the pre-cosmic chaos – often associated with the **Receptacle** or space – in a state of disordered motion. Because the Demiurge is perfectly good, he desires that all things come to be as good and ordered as possible ²⁰. “Order is in every way better than disorder,” he asserts, **so the god imposes**

mathematical and rational order onto the chaos of becoming ⁵ . This is the first key point: the **cosmic domain of becoming is not left as brute flux**; it is **shaped by νοῦς (Intelligence)** into a coherent kosmos (literally an “order, adornment”). Anything that *comes-to-be* (since it has a cause) can be made in imitation of an intelligible model ²¹ ²⁰ . Thus, from the start, Plato depicts the realm of genesis as **molded by active forces (the Demiurge and Forms as causal principles) upon a passive substrate (the Receptacle or primordial chaos)** – a clear parallel to the active/passive dimension but raised to the cosmic scale. The resulting world is called a **“generated god”**, a mortal god that moves in time but is as ordered and beautiful as possible ²² ²³ . Notably, the Demiurge “*placed nous (intelligence) in soul, and soul in body*” to ensure the universe is a living being capable of rational order ²⁴ ²⁵ . In other words, **the cosmos itself has an invisible rational soul** governing its visible body.

- **The World-Soul: Being, Sameness, and Difference (Active/Passive in the Cosmic Mix):** The Demiurge constructs the *World-Soul* by mixing three fundamental ingredients: the indivisible, unchanging Being (related to the Forms), the divisible and changing Becoming, and a third intermediate essence of **Sameness (Τοῦ αὐτοῦ)** and **Difference (Θάτερον)** ²⁶ . This mixture is then separated and woven into the cosmic soul. The result is an entity that is **intermediate in nature** – “*not the intelligible [alone] nor the sensible [alone], but a mixture of both*” ²⁷ . This doctrine explicitly confirms an **ontological “middle band”** in reality: the World-Soul partakes in the rationality of Forms (Being) and the dynamism of Becoming. It is noteworthy that the World-Soul’s composition includes *Difference* – an ontological principle corresponding to **otherness, change, the dynamic aspect**, and *Sameness* – corresponding to **identity, permanence, the static aspect**. These map broadly onto the Active/Passive or at least the changing vs. unchanging dimensions identified earlier. Once the Soul is formed, the Demiurge **splits it into two massive circles or bands** and sets them at angles, like an X shape, then bends them into concentric rings ²⁸ . One ring is the **Circle of the Same** (identical, uniform motion), and the other is the **Circle of the Different** ⁴ . The Circle of the Same is left intact and undivided, whereas the Circle of the Different is **split into seven unequal circles** revolving at different speeds ²⁹ . These seven circles correspond to the motions of the **seven “wandering” stars** (the classical planets: Moon, Sun, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn) ³⁰ ³¹ . In this cosmology, we see **a rational structuring of motion**: the world-soul’s **inner circle** (Different) managing the diverse, changing motions (the planets in the heavens), and the **outer circle** (Same) ensuring a unified rotation of the whole heavens (the daily east-to-west rotation of the fixed stars). This is essentially a cosmic instantiation of **active and passive principles** and **temporal becoming**: the rotations are motions (so the cosmos is never static), but they are perfectly ordered motions (so the flux is regular and intelligible). Each planet’s motion is a harmonious part of time’s fabric. Indeed, *Time* itself is introduced at this point: “the moving image of eternity” – the eternal (unchanging) is “imaged” in the moving cycles of days, months, years ³² ³³ . Thus the **Coming-to-be/Ceasing-to-be** dimension is built into the cosmic order as cyclical time. The **active vs. passive** dimension can also be discerned: the world-soul is the active rational cause imposing patterns of motion, while the material world (the moving bodies) is the passive recipient of those motions, maintaining them through Necessity. But rather than raw friction and chance giving rise to phenomena (as in the earlier perception theory), here **nous directly choreographs** the motions – a grand “active force” ensuring the whole of Becoming is as ordered as possible. Timaeus explicitly says the Demiurge chose the **one kind of motion that is associated with understanding (νοῦς)** – namely, uniform **circular rotation in place** – and “*set [the cosmic soul] turning continuously in the same spot, spinning around upon itself*” ³⁴ . All other (linear) motions were excluded from the primordial soul’s motion, to preserve order ³⁵ ³⁶ . This strikingly matches the idea that *reason only operates through certain*

structured activities and prevents random motion (rest corresponds to death; uncontrolled motion corresponds to chaos). By giving the cosmos **the motion of reason (self-rotation)**, Plato indicates that **the cosmos is a rational, self-activating being** – its activity is guided by a mind-like principle rather than external pushes and pulls.

- **Nous Governing Becoming:** In the *Timaeus* narrative, once the stars and heavenly bodies are set in motion, the Creator addresses the newly minted gods and assigns them the task of creating mortal creatures, while **promising that the divine part (the immortal soul) in those creatures will be provided by himself** ²² ³⁷. He emphasizes that the cosmos, being his workmanship, is “**indissoluble**” so long as he wills, and although it is generated (hence not absolutely eternal), it will never be allowed to perish ²² ³⁸. This underscores that *coming-to-be* at the cosmic level is made as stable as it can be – the world is a perpetual living thing, not subject to aging or death like its parts. **Reason (νοῦς)** ensures continuity. Later in the dialogue (at 47e–48a), Plato introduces a crucial principle: the world’s order emerges from a blend of **Intellect (Nous)** and **Necessity**. “*Nous persuaded Necessity to direct most things toward the best*” ⁶. This line encapsulates Plato’s answer to how the realm of becoming can be both **law-bound** and yet not chaotic: **necessity** (the inexorable behavior of the material elements) is “**persuaded**” by the **intelligent design** to yield a cosmos. Nous doesn’t abolish the inherent tendencies of matter (e.g. the passive resistance of the Receptacle or the properties of the elements), but it **guides them** – a rational persuasion rather than brute force. This is a metaphysical picture of **active and passive cooperation**: intelligence is the active cause, necessity the passive substrate, and the result is the structured reality we observe. The world-soul itself, once in motion, has cognitive functions: when its **Circle of the Same** revolved, it **apprehends unchanging reality with perfect intelligence**, and when its **Circle of the Different** revolved, it **apprehends the changing world with doxa (perceptual belief)** ³⁹. In short, *the cosmos is literally thinking as it moves*. Plato says the world-soul “*ever thinks the same thoughts about the same things*” when it rotates on itself ⁴⁰ – this is the cosmic analogue of unceasing rational activity. Meanwhile, the divided circle (Different) yields the multiplicity of perceptions of the changing world. This two-tier cognition of the world-soul mirrors the human soul’s reason/opinion divide, and it confirms that the **Visible and Invisible** aspects are built into the cosmic order: the world-soul keeps the intelligible patterns (invisible Forms) always in mind via the Circle of Same, while monitoring and guiding the realm of sensory phenomena via the Circle of Different ⁴¹ ⁴². Thus, the **invisible intelligible structure** (the Forms, mathematical ratios, etc.) and the **visible manifest world** (the stars, earthly creatures, etc.) are bridged by the soul’s operations. The cosmic domain of becoming is thoroughly **knowable and structured** – it is not a whirl of appearances but a kind of *Living Organism* where every change happens according to mathematical proportions and harmonic cycles (as evidenced by the precise divisions of the world-soul and the harmonic intervals used in forming it ⁴³). It is, in essence, **an ontological middle realm**, where **being and becoming intertwine**: the world “*copy*” has features of the eternal model (intelligible structure, oneness, goodness) and features of generated things (motion, change, visibility).

In sum, the *Timaeus* confirms that Plato envisions the **realm of becoming as an orderly cosmos** – not a deceitful illusion, but a “**moving image of eternity**”. Within this cosmos operate the three dimensions we’ve identified: - **Active vs Passive:** Demiurge and Forms act; the receptacle and matter receive; world-soul imposes motion; bodies undergo it. Every level of reality involves this duality, from gods shaping mortal lives to elements interacting. Even the *human soul* in the *Timaeus* must actively realign its disturbed motions (caused by embodiment) with the orderly motions of the cosmos through education and astronomy, an active effort to regain reason ⁴⁴ ⁴⁵. - **Coming-to-be vs Ceasing-to-be:** Time and change

are real in the cosmos. Stars are created, the world itself had a beginning (in the account, though Plato calls it a “likely story” since as a perfect work the cosmos has no temporal start in a literal sense). Mortal creatures are born and die under the governance of the gods. Yet all this coming and ceasing is regulated – **periodic recurrence** (cycles) gives a rhythm to becoming instead of lawless flux. The cosmos will not cease as a whole (by divine guarantee) ⁴⁶ ⁴⁷, so the balance is tipped toward preserving order in becoming. - **Visible vs Invisible:** The cosmos is **visible** – literally the Demiurge made it primarily of fire so that it might be seen ⁴⁸ – but it is crafted in the image of invisible Forms. It contains both **visible bodies** (earth, stars, animals) and **invisible souls and intellectual principles**. Plato even describes the *Receptacle* as “invisible and characterless, hardly graspable” – yet it’s the backdrop of all physical appearance ⁴⁹ ⁵⁰. The *Timaeus* repeatedly draws distinction between what is grasped by **nous with a rational account (the eternal model)** and what is grasped by **opinion with perception (the generated copy)** ²¹. The cosmic order ties these together: the world-soul ensures that the *generated copy remains aligned to the intelligible model*, making the invisible visible in a structured way.

Through this cosmology, Plato demonstrates that the **intermediate field of emergence – the cosmos – is rationally structured**. It is “*a single visible living creature containing all other living creatures, which are themselves visible*” and modelled after “*the intelligible Living Thing (the paradigm) that is only graspable by intellect*” ⁵¹ ⁵². We might say that Plato’s cosmos is **the stage on which the drama of active and passive, change and persistence, visible and invisible is played out under the direction of divine Mind**. This answers the core question: these three dimensions are not arbitrary aspects of seeming – they are **essential structural features of a reality governed by reason**.

III. Integration of Myth and Metaphysics: The Three Fates and the Order of Time (Republic 617c)

Plato often uses myth to reinforce his philosophical ideas, and the eschatological myth at the end of the *Republic* (the Myth of Er, Republic 10.616b–621d) is a prime example. In this mythic vision, we find a **symbolic portrayal of the cosmos and the role of intelligent forces (Fates, Sirens, Necessity) in maintaining its order**, which resonates strongly with the framework established in the *Timaeus*. Particularly relevant is the scene featuring the **Spindle of Necessity** and the **Three Fates – Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos – at 617b-c**. The imagery here confirms in a mystical mode that **Plato’s three dimensions of being are woven into the fabric of cosmic and human destiny**:

- **Cosmic Spindle and Sirens:** Er sees the universe represented as a colossal spindle turning on the lap of Lady Necessity. Eight concentric whorls represent the orbits of the fixed stars and the seven planets, all interlocked in one spindle. On the rim of each whorl sits a Siren singing a single note, together producing a divine harmony ⁵³ ⁷. This already echoes the *Timaeus*’ picture: the **seven planetary orbits** with a contrary motion to the whole, and a unifying musical scale – it’s a mythologized reference to the mathematical order and harmony of the heavens. The Sirens’ song (one note each) suggests that each cosmic body has its rational frequency, and together they form an ordered cosmos (the “music of the spheres”). The involvement of **Necessity** implies that this order is *bound* – the cosmos is held together by the spindle’s spin (recall *Timaeus*’ “belt of the heavens”).
- **The Three Fates and Temporal Order:** Around the spindle sit the three daughters of Necessity, **the Moirai (Fates): Lachesis, Clotho, Atropos**, “dressed in white, with garlands, singing in tune with the Sirens’

harmony". Each Fate has a specific temporal reference: "*Lachesis singing of the past, Clotho of the present, Atropos of the future.*" ⁷ . Moreover, they are not idle: "*Clotho, from time to time, assisted with a touch of her right hand the revolution of the outer circle [of the spindle], Atropos with her left hand touched and guided the inner ones, and Lachesis aided each in turn with either hand.*" ⁷ . This arresting image encodes multiple layers of metaphysical meaning:

- The **personification of Past, Present, Future** affirms that **time is an ontological feature** of the cosmos. The Fates *sing* time into the cosmic harmony – implying that the flow of time (what has been, what is, what will be) is an integral part of the cosmic order, not an accident. The fact that each Fate's song is in harmony with the Sirens suggests that **time itself is harmonious** when governed by divine law (not a chaotic series of events).
- The **active role** of the Fates in *turning the spindle* speaks to the **Active/Passive dimension** on a cosmic scale. The spindle may be Necessity (the given structure of the cosmos), but it requires the *active touches* of Intelligence (here, the goddesses) to keep it properly rotating. Clotho uses her right hand on the outermost heaven (perhaps symbolizing the primum mobile or the all-encompassing motion of Same), Atropos uses her left on the inner circles (the various differing motions), and Lachesis (the allotter) coordinates both. This beautifully mirrors the idea from *Timaeus* that **Nous (or in mythic terms, the gods) guides the revolutions**: *Clotho's right-hand touch on the outer circle* could correspond to ensuring the uniform rotation (Same) is stable (the *present* upholds the eternal order), *Atropos's left-hand on inner circles* ensures the differing motions (Different) proceed correctly into the *future*, and *Lachesis alternating hands* suggests the weaving of past influences and future outcomes into the present allotments (she allots destinies based on past lives, in the myth). The **Active vs Passive** pair is thus symbolized: the cosmos (spindle) would be inert or random without the active governance of these intelligent forces.
- The involvement of all three temporal phases also emphasizes the **reality of Coming-to-be and Ceasing-to-be**: *Clotho (Present)* spins each moment into being, *Atropos (Future)* brings each thread to its inevitable end (her name means "unturnable" or inexorable – she cuts the thread of life at death), and *Lachesis (Past)* hands out the lots based on what has already been (memory of past, karma). Through their coordinated work, **each soul's journey and indeed the entire world's motion is a continuous thread**. The myth thus conveys that **change over time** (birth, life, death – past to future) is overseen by cosmic law. Things do not randomly pop in and out of existence; their *genesis* and *phthora* are woven by the Fates according to the order of the Whole. This is a mythical acknowledgement of a principle akin to conservation of reality: what comes to be and passes away does so for a reason, in an ordered sequence (in the myth, souls choose new lives and are reallocated accordingly – their rebirth is not senseless).
- Finally, the very presence of **Necessity and her daughters** highlights the **Visible/Invisible dimension**. These figures are not visible to ordinary eyes; they represent the **invisible framework of law and destiny** behind the visible occurrences in life. The spindle's whorls are visible cosmic bodies, but Necessity's *binding force* and the Fates' *songs* and *touches* are invisible causes. In Platonic terms, we could say the Fates personify the **invisible rational structure** (the laws of nature and fate) that ensures the heavens turn with perfect regularity and that time's events unfold intelligibly. That Lachesis, Clotho, Atropos are *goddesses* implies a level of reality higher than mortals – akin to how the Forms or divine reason stands above and guides the sensible realm. Yet they are intimately engaged in the physical cosmos

(touching the spindle) – symbolizing that the intelligible and sensible realms constantly interact.

In this mythic tableau, Plato poetically **confirms the ontology of a “middle” realm** we have been discussing. The **spindle of Necessity** is effectively the *world of becoming* – the rotating universe with its visible planets and stars, producing time. It is flanked by the **transcendent realm** (the ultimate source of the light and the “model” – hinted by the column of light and the reference to the spindle being suspended from the heavens) and by the **individual soul realms** (the souls that await rebirth in the meadow and choose their fates – representing perhaps the microcosm that will go back into the macrocosm). The **Three Fates** then are like guarantors that the intermediate realm remains **cohesive, law-governed, and meaningfully connected to both past and future**. This is essentially a *mythical dramatization of the same triadic structure*: *Sameness* (the present order maintained by Clotho’s hand), *Difference* (the changes and future spun by Atropos), and the *mixture or measure* (Lachesis distributing based on past causes). The presence of three is not coincidental; as scholars from antiquity (including the Neoplatonists) noted, Plato often embeds **triadic patterns** in his thought to mirror the dynamic of stability, change, and mediation.

Thus, the Myth of Er doesn’t stand apart from Plato’s metaphysics – it reinforces the message that **the cosmos of change is not a realm of mere illusion** but a realm pervaded by **intelligible structure and moral law**. The Fates ensure that *becoming* (symbolized by the spinning and the thread of life) is **anchored to Being** (symbolized by the spindle’s axial light of Necessity that holds the cosmos together and the harmonic structure). Our three ontological dimensions are all present: **active intelligence vs passive necessity, temporal process of birth-death vs eternal cyclic return, and invisible law (fate, justice) vs visible planetary motions and reincarnations**. Plato’s philosophical scaffolding and his mythology thus mutually illuminate one another, painting a consistent picture of reality as *orderly change* under the governance of reason.

Conclusion: Fundamental Axes of Reality in a Reason-Governed Cosmos

Through this investigation, we find strong support for the hypothesis that **Plato treats Active/Passive, Becoming/Ceasing, and Visible/Invisible as fundamental ontological dimensions** that structure the reality between pure being and non-being. These are not arbitrary dichotomies imposed by us; Plato’s own dialogues give them pride of place in explaining how the world works:

- In the *Theaetetus*, Plato (via Socrates) **affirms the reality of causal interaction**, the continuous **coming-to-be of qualities and perceptions**, and the existence of **unseen factors** as prerequisites for knowledge ¹² ³. He criticizes any philosophy that would dismiss change, agency, or the unseen as unreal, indicating that, for Plato, *any adequate ontology must include these*. The three dimensions are shown to be *interdependent*: e.g. an **active cause and passive receptor produce a coming-to-be** (a new state which will eventually cease) that transitions something from invisible to visible (or intelligible to sensible). Reality for Plato is **relational and processual**, not a static block—yet the processes have *direction* and *form*.
- The *Timaeus* deepens this by providing a **cosmological model** of a “middle realm”: the cosmos is a **living, rationally ordered being in time**. It was crafted by an active intellect and endowed with a world-soul that mediates between eternal Forms and transient matter ²⁶. The result is that the **universal process of becoming** is not formless: it unfolds in mathematically precise patterns (as

evidenced by the orbital periods, the geometric construction of elements, etc.), guided by the **principle of Nous** aiming at the Good ²⁰ 6 . In short, Plato's metaphysics does **recognize an ontological hierarchy**: at the top, changeless Being (Forms); at the bottom, the chaos of total non-structure (the *Receptacle* or purely indeterminate "matter"); and **in between, the ordered cosmos (with soul)** where change happens in a rule-bound way. The three dimensions are essentially the **axes along which this middle realm operates**. We might say:

- *Active/Passive* corresponds to the **axis of causation**: everything in the cosmos results from the interplay of intelligent cause and necessary condition.
- *Becoming/Ceasing* corresponds to the **axis of temporality**: the cosmos exists in time and its contents have life cycles, but time itself is structured (circular, returning, measured by the heavenly movements).
- *Visible/Invisible* corresponds to the **axis of manifestation**: the cosmos has both a manifest aspect (the tangible, visible bodies) and a hidden aspect (the soul, the forms it contemplates, the numerical ratios) – the latter permeates and gives meaning to the former.
- The *Republic's* mythic imagery corroborates that **Plato conceives of the world's changing order as upheld by intelligible principles**. The fact that the Fates are **three**, tied to **time**, and actively ensure the harmony of the whole, is a poetic confirmation that *what is born, acts, changes, and dies* does so **anchored to eternal norms** (Necessity, Justice) and is **comprehensible**. The myth dramatizes that **rational structure (the spindle and harmony) underlies the flow of time and events**, so even our mortal fates are part of a bigger intelligible pattern. This again underscores: the triadic dimensions are not just how humans categorize things; they are how reality is articulated by the Platonic Demiurge or by the weave of Necessity and Intelligence.

In light of all this, we can assert that **Plato's metaphysics indeed includes a "rationally structured domain of becoming"** distinct from but dependent on eternal Being. It is *"distinct from eternal Being"* because, unlike the Forms, it changes and includes birth and death; it is also distinct from mere *"unstable appearance"* because it is not lawless – it is stabilized by participation in or imitation of the Forms. The three dimensions we explored function as **ontological coordinates** in this middle realm: any entity or event in the cosmos can be analyzed by asking: *What is active and what is passive in it? What comes-to-be and passes away in it (how does it unfold in time)? What aspects are visible and what are invisible?* Plato's philosophy provides answers in each case by linking them to his broader principles (e.g. an active cause ultimately traces to the Form of the Good or divine Nous; a thing's coming-to-be is explained by the World-Soul's patterns or the reincarnation cycles; a thing's invisible aspect might be its form or purpose, while its visible aspect is its material presence).

Furthermore, treating these oppositions as **"axes of being"** helps illuminate later developments in the Platonic tradition. Neoplatonist philosophers, for example, built elaborate triadic schemas (such as *Being-Life-Mind* or the procession of the One into Intellect into Soul) that echo the need for an intermediary stage between absolute unity and the multiplicity of the material world. Plotinus' hierarchy (One -> Intellect -> Soul -> Nature) can be seen as an extension of Plato's insight that a **mediating principle (Soul/Nous) organises the realm of change**. The active/passive could be paralleled in the emanative act of the One and the receptive nature of Soul; the becoming/ceasing in the Soul's governance of temporal creation; the visible/invisible in the distinction between the intelligible Intellect and the visible world it engenders. This

suggests that **Plato's three dimensions laid the groundwork for later metaphysical systems** that account for emergence and order.

In modern terms, one might say Plato presents a kind of **proto-“process ontology”** but one that is *teleological* and *intelligible*. Modern metaphysics often wrestles with how to reconcile change with identity, or how to ground the laws of nature. Plato offers a remarkably prescient model: a universe where **change is real** but **not anarchic**, because it's orchestrated by something like **cosmic intelligence**. The active vs passive is analogous to modern notions of forces and receptivity; the structured becoming is analogous to lawful evolution in time; the visible/invisible is akin to manifest phenomena vs underlying patterns or information. Scholars have noted that Plato's view of emergence in the *Theaetetus* (the way perception emerges from the interaction of motions) is an early articulation of what we'd call **relational properties** or **event ontology** (nothing has meaning in isolation, only in interaction) ⁵⁴ ⁵⁵ . Thus, Plato's metaphysics is far richer than a simple dualism – it posits a *continuum* from the intelligible to the sensible, held together by these triadic structures.

In conclusion, the evidence strongly supports that Plato embraces these three dimensions as *essential categories of being within the realm of change*, and he conceives this realm as **thoroughly suffused with rationality**. The Active/Passive, Becoming/Ceasing, Visible/Invisible distinctions are **ontologically real** (the “uninitiated” who deny them are plainly wrong ³), and they are the very means by which *voũς* organizes the world. The rational order (whether depicted as the Demiurge's design or the Fates' spindle) makes the flux of nature a **kosmos (orderly whole)**. Thus, between the timeless Forms and the utter chaos of non-being, Plato shows us a **universe of mediated reality** – a reality that *becomes* and *appears*, but does so in a rule-bound way, always informed by the interplay of opposites striving toward harmony. It is in this intermediate, dynamically structured **“field of emergence”** that human experience and knowledge take place, and where the soul can, by tuning itself to the cosmic ratios, **grasp truth**. Reality for Plato is *neither simply eternal and static, nor simply a fleeting phantasm*, but a **dance of changeless intellect and changeful world**, moving to the music of fundamental ontological principles. In affirming the three dimensions of being, Plato gives philosophical warrant to trust that the world of becoming is **intelligible through and through** – a domain where reason (*voũς*) is continuously at work, **“leading most things toward what is best”** ⁶ .

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