

Diagonal Movement and the Soul's Passage Through Plato's Ontological Cube

Abstract

Plato's rare reference to "diagonal" motion (διαγώνιος) in *Timaeus* 36c-d provides a striking geometric metaphor for the soul's oblique ascent from passive experience toward active rationality. This research interprets the World Soul's diagonal movement of the Different as a cipher for asymmetrical cognitive transitions across a structured ontological space. We identify three fundamental axes in Plato's ontology – Active vs. Passive, Coming-to-be vs. Ceasing-to-be, and Visible vs. Invisible – which define an "ontological cube" of eight possible states describing the soul's relation to temporal being. Each vertex corresponds to a distinct configuration (from receptive perception of the present to active anticipation of the future, including engagement with "what is not"), and Plato's texts support each binary opposition ¹ ² . Crucially, four diagonal paths through this cube represent the soul's passage from passive to active within the same temporal domain ("What Is," "What Was," "What Will Be," and "What Is Not"). These diagonals illustrate **nous** transforming **pathos** into **logos**: through oblique motions of recollection, projection, differentiation, and articulation, the soul navigates the realm of becoming. Diagonal movement thus emerges as a unifying metaphor for the soul's rational ordering of temporal reality.

1. Philosophical Significance of Diagonal Movement

Plato's mention of the *diagonal* (διαγώνιος) at *Timaeus* 36c-d appears in the context of the cosmic soul's two fundamental motions. The creator sets the circle of the Same moving "sideways to the right," but the circle of the Different he sets "diagonally and to the left" ³ . This explicit use of διαγώνιος – virtually unique in Plato – signals more than a geometric detail. In Greek mathematics the diagonal of a square was emblematic of incommensurability (e.g. the $\sqrt{2}$ length, discovered by Theaetetus's school ⁴), an *irratio* that disrupts simple harmony. Plato invokes this idea at the very moment the World Soul is formed, blending Sameness with Otherness. The diagonal motion "to the left" of the Different introduces asymmetry and novelty into the cosmos ³ , contrasting with the uniform revolution of the Same. In philosophical terms, the *Different's* diagonal signifies the generative principle of variance – the capacity for things to deviate, change, and become otherwise than the purely identical. It is an *oblique* motion, not aligned with the stable axes of the cosmic order, thus symbolizing the unpredictable, dynamic aspect of reality (the realm of becoming).

Plato's cosmology thereby encodes a metaphor: just as the cosmic soul's rational order (the Same) is intersected by the diagonal of Otherness, so the soul's *cognitive* journey is not a straight line but a diagonal traversal across different modes of being. The soul does not attain knowledge by moving in a single, level plane; rather, it must negotiate the incommensurable leaps between passive perception and active understanding, between temporal flux and eternal form. The diagonal path suggests an indirect but necessary route. It "cuts across" multiple dimensions of experience simultaneously, much as the motion of the Different cuts across the circle of the Same. In the *Timaeus*, the interplay of the two circles produces the faculties of opinion and knowledge in the soul: the circle of the Other (moving diagonally) communicates

perceptions throughout the soul as true opinions, while the circle of the Same (aligned with the intelligible) yields nous and knowledge ⁵ ⁶. The soul's rational engagement with becoming, in other words, results from the diagonal interweaving of the two motions.

This strongly suggests that Plato's diagonal is a **metaphorical key** to understanding cognitive transformation. The diagonal movement of the Different can plausibly represent the soul's asymmetric transitions – those leaps of insight or understanding that are not simply linear accumulations of data, but require a shift across ontological categories. For example, recognizing a *difference* (that something is *not* something else) is an oblique cognitive move that introduces new structure. Theaetetus 186b describes the soul reflecting “within itself upon the past and the present with an eye to the future” ⁷ – a process that is not a straightforward look at any one time, but a comparison across times, an *angle* uniting disparate moments. Such forward-looking judgment is inherently diagonal, connecting what *was* and *is* (on one plane) to project *what will be* (on another plane). Thus, Plato's rare image of diagonal motion richly conveys the soul's traversal through the dimensions of becoming. It is an *oblique ascent*: the soul must move “diagonally” through passive and active states, across temporal stages, and between visible and invisible realms, in order to generate **logos** (rational account) out of the flux of experience. In sum, the diagonal of the Different is not only a cosmological detail but a philosophical cipher – a symbol that the rational soul's journey through the world of becoming is complex, asymmetrical, and transformative.

2. Validation of the Three-Axis Framework

We propose that three binary axes structure the soul's engagement with temporal being: (1) **Passive vs. Active**, (2) **Coming-to-be vs. Ceasing-to-be**, and (3) **Visible vs. Invisible**. Each of these oppositions is firmly grounded in Platonic ontology, rather than being arbitrary epistemological distinctions. Plato's dialogues explicitly distinguish these modes of being:

- **Passive (Pathos) vs. Active (Nous/Logos):** Plato often contrasts the soul's passive reception of impressions with its active imposition of form. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates stresses that *knowledge is not the same as perception* – true cognition requires the soul's active judgment *about* what is perceived ⁸. He notes that sense-organs deliver raw data passively, but the mind “**views some things by herself**” and “*reasoning* (λογισμῷ) *about them*” yields truth ⁹. In Greek terms, the soul *πάσχειν* (“undergoes” or suffers impressions) versus *ποιεῖν* or *διακοσμεῖν* (“does/arranges” form). For example, in *Timaeus* 37a-c the world-soul, upon encountering a sensory input, is *moved* and “*proclaims*” (active articulation) what the thing is same as or different from ¹⁰. The initial *touch* (contact with an external thing) is a passive affection, whereas the ensuing *logos* that “arises in the soul” is an active cognitive product ¹¹. Thus, Plato conceives an ontological difference between a passive state of *being affected* and an active state of *initiating form*. The soul's **πάθος** (passive experience) is ontologically incomplete until **νοῦς** intervenes to shape it into **λόγος** ⁸. The Active/Passive axis therefore reflects a fundamental Platonic distinction between what is merely given to the soul and what the soul itself contributes.
- **Coming-to-be vs. Ceasing-to-be (Becoming vs. Being-complete):** Temporality in Plato's ontology is marked by a contrast between what is in flux and what is stable. In *Timaeus* 37d-38a, Plato clarifies that only things subject to time can “*was*” or “*will be*”, whereas eternal being can only be described by “*is*” ¹. “*Was* and ‘*will be*’,” he says, “*are forms of time which have been generated*,” appropriate to **γένεσις** (the realm of becoming), whereas “*is*” pertains to eternal **οὐσία** ¹. The text pointedly notes that we mistakenly apply temporal verbs to eternal being, but in truth “*was*” and “*will be*”

belong only to what **comes-to-be and passes away** in time ¹. Further, at 38a Plato states “*nothing that becomes (γενόμενον) is ever eternal, and nothing eternal ever becomes*”, reinforcing the ontological binary. The *Timaeus* uses the language of coming-to-be versus being “completely” (τελέως) or ceasing. Likewise in the *Parmenides* (155c-d), the “one that is” is shown to participate in time: “*the one was and is and will be, and has come to be and is coming-to-be and will come-to-be.*” ¹². This elaborate phrasing underlines that when something exists in time, it can be characterized as having *become* and as in the process of becoming or ending. Plato even uses relational terms “**older**” (πρεσβύτερον) and “**younger**” (νεώτερον) at *Parmenides* 155b-c to indicate temporal priority and posteriority ¹³ ¹⁴. These terms, ostensibly about age, are in fact logical markers of earlier vs. later – effectively metaphors for past and future. Thus “coming-to-be” vs. “ceasing-to-be” is an ontologically charged axis: it differentiates states that are in the process of emerging from those that are completed (or in the process of fading). A thing “*coming-to-be*” is characterized by change and incompleteness (like the *present moving into the future*), whereas a thing “*ceased-to-be*” (or *having-become*) is fixed, determinate, and in a sense past or finished. Plato associates γένεσις (becoming) with the former and οὐσία/τελειότης with the latter ¹⁵. We therefore ground this axis in Plato’s temporal ontology: it separates the *forming* from the *formed*.

- **Visible vs. Invisible:** Plato frequently distinguishes the *visible realm* of sensible, bodily things from the *invisible realm* of intelligible or incorporeal things. In *Phaedo* 79b-c, Socrates asks “*Is the soul visible or invisible?*” When Simmias replies that the soul is not visible to humans, Socrates concludes: “*So the soul is more like the invisible, while the body is more like the visible.*” ¹⁶. Here ἀόρατον (“invisible”) and ὁρατόν (“visible”) denote an ontological dichotomy: the soul and Forms belong to a non-visual, intelligible order, whereas the body and sensible objects belong to the visible world. The *Timaeus* echoes this: the Demiurge crafted the body of the cosmos as visible and tangible, but “*soul, for its part, was invisible, partaking of reason and harmony*” ². Vision is the sense most tied to concrete material things; what is **invisible** in Plato is not simply unseen, but incapable of being seen *by nature* – usually because it lacks material form or is an intelligible essence. This axis thus tracks the distinction between the **sensible** (that which is perceptible by the bodily senses, anchored in external appearance) and the **intelligible** (that which is grasped by the mind inwardly, with no physical appearance). Plato’s “Divided Line” in *Republic* VI, for instance, is fundamentally a split between the visible realm (images and physical things) and the intelligible realm (mathematics and Forms). In the context of the soul’s activity, this axis differentiates whether the object of the soul’s relation is something concretely present to perception (φαινόμενον) or something accessible only to thought (hidden, past, future, or abstract). Thus, *Visible vs. Invisible* is not a mere epistemic distinction but an ontological one in Plato: it separates two kinds of being and cognition (the world of γένεσις perceived by the senses, and the world of νοητά apprehended by the mind).

Together, these three axes carve out an eightfold matrix of states. Each axis is independently attested in Plato’s work as a fundamental “either/or” condition of entities or experiences. The **Active/Passive** axis reflects whether form is being imposed or received; the **Becoming/Completed** axis reflects a thing’s temporal mode of being; the **Visible/Invisible** axis reflects the ontology of sensible vs. intelligible existence. Because Plato consistently deploys these dichotomies (e.g. *pathos* vs. *logos*, temporal vs. eternal, seen vs. unseen), it is justified to treat them as orthogonal dimensions of the soul’s world. They are not merely linguistic or epistemological distinctions, but real structural features of Plato’s metaphysics: how things *are* in the cosmos and how the soul *encounters* them. Each axis can be understood in Greek terms – e.g. πάσχειν vs. διακοσμοῦν, γίγνεσθαι vs. τελευτάν (or γεγονέναι), ὁρατός vs. ἀόρατος – underscoring

that Plato's own vocabulary marks these oppositions. We will therefore use these three axes to define positions of the soul in the field of becoming, confident that each reflects a Platonic ontological framework.

3. Justification of the Eight Positions

By combining the three binary axes above, we obtain **eight possible ontological-cognitive positions** for the soul. These correspond to the eight "vertices" of a conceptual cube (with coordinates in the order: [Active/Passive, Coming-to-be/Ceasing-to-be, Visible/Invisible], where 0 signifies the first term and 1 the second). Each position describes *how the soul stands in relation to a state of being*. We can label these positions in intuitive terms (following the preliminary narrative's terms "What Is," "What Was," "What Will Be," and "What Is Not," each modulated by Passive or Active). Below is a table of the eight positions, with coordinates, Greek keywords (where applicable), and brief descriptions:

Coordinates (x,y,z)	Position (Soul's State)	Greek Reference (grammatical form, meaning)	Description (Soul's relation to being)
(0,0,0)	Passive "What Will Be"	(implicit: μέλλον / γιγνόμενον)	Pure receptivity to an as-yet-unformed future – the soul is open to what is coming-to-be without yet shaping it. It passively awaits and witnesses emergence.
(1,0,1)	Active "What Will Be"	προορώμενος (masc. part., "looking forward")	Anticipatory projection – the soul actively <i>foresees</i> or projects an image of the future before it materializes ⁷ . This is the exercise of nous turning an undefined future into a conceived possibility.
(0,0,1)	Passive "What Was"	γεγονώς (perf. part., "having become")	Retention of the past – the soul passively holds what <i>has come to be</i> but is no longer visible (e.g. memory traces). It experiences past impressions simply as given, without analysis, as in stored memory.
(1,1,1)	Active "What Was"	ἀναλογιζομένη (fem. part., "analogizing" or "reckoning proportionally")	Retrospective synthesis – the soul actively <i>recollects</i> and reconstructs past experiences by reasoning ¹⁷ . Through analogy and understanding, it connects and gives form to memory (e.g. making meaning of what has happened).
(0,1,1)	Passive "What Is"	πάσχειν (inf., "to undergo/suffer")	Immediate experience of the present – the soul is presently affected by reality without yet intellectually organizing it. This is the raw, unsynthesized perception of "what is" (present facts or states) as it <i>undergoes</i> them ¹⁸ .

Coordinates (x,y,z)	Position (Soul's State)	Greek Reference (grammatical form, meaning)	Description (Soul's relation to being)
(1,1,0)	Active "What Is"	διακοσμοῦν (pres. part., "arranging in order")	Rational structuring of the present – the soul actively imposes form and order on the present visible situation, yielding clarity and λόγος. It's the intellect <i>organizing</i> what is presently perceived into a coherent account ⁹ . (Literally "adorning/arranging," as νοῦς does in cosmogony).
(0,1,0)	Passive "What Is Not"	μὴ ὄντα (neut. pl. acc., "things that are not")	Apprehension of absence – the soul passively registers a negation or an absent state ("what is not" here-and-now). It is aware of a privation or what something is <i>not</i> , but without yet defining the contrast.
(1,0,0)	Active "What Is Not"	(implicit: θέσις τοῦ μὴ ὄντος) (— act of positing "not-being")	Active negation / differentiation – the soul delineates what a thing <i>is not</i> , imposing a boundary through otherness . By <i>differentiating</i> one thing from another, it gives structure to negation (e.g. "X is not Y"). This posits "what is not" as a definite <i>other</i> ¹⁹ , an act essential to thought and definition.

Each of these eight positions represents a distinct configuration of the soul engaging with an ontological condition. They are not arbitrary concoctions, but naturally arise from Plato's categories. We can verify their plausibility by examining Platonic examples and concepts for each:

- **Passive "What Will Be" (0,0,0):** The soul here is like a blank slate facing the future – *pure expectation without input*. In Plato's philosophy, this corresponds to the state of *potentiality* regarding future events. We might compare it to how the Demiurge in *Timaeus* faces the formless chora before imposing order, or how the rational soul awaits the μελλόντων (things-to-come) without yet discerning them. Theaetetus 186b implies the soul can consider what **will be** only by first receiving present/past; at the very start of that process, the soul's stance toward the future is wholly receptive – it "lets the future happen" to it. This position underscores the soul's openness to *possibility*. It is ontologically on the side of **coming-to-be** (y=0) and epistemically still in the **visible** realm (z=0) insofar as the future can only be imagined based on present visibles. Yet the soul is passive (x=0): it has not taken initiative, only a readiness for *pathos* by the future. (Think of waiting without anticipation, a kind of *tabula rasa* for what will unfold.)
- **Active "What Will Be" (1,0,1):** Here the soul *actively envisions the future*. Plato gives a vivid description in *Theaetetus* 186b: the mind "*makes a calculation within itself of past and present in relation to the future*" ⁷. The Greek term προορώμενος ("foreseeing" or "looking forward") captures this forward-looking activity of νοῦς. The soul crosses into activity (x=1) by using memory and reason to project what is not yet visible – hence z=1 (the projected image is "invisible" in that it exists only in the mind's eye, not in present sight). It remains on the coming-to-be side (y=0) because the future

outcome is something that *will* come into being. This position is exemplified by any *intentional planning or anticipation* in Plato's dialogues – for instance, an expert doctor or navigator, in *Theaetetus*, who can predict future outcomes by reasoning (Socrates there notes the superiority of **nous** in foreseeing what will be ⁷). The *Active What Will Be* thus describes the soul's *projective power*: it transforms a passive possibility into an *idea of the future*. This is a necessary step in rational deliberation (e.g. in decision-making, one *imagines* future consequences). Plato's emphasis on the rational soul's foresight (e.g. the *Promethean* aspect of **νοῦς**) aligns with this position.

- **Passive “What Was” (0,0,1):** In this state, the soul simply *houses the past*. Plato's view of memory often likens the mind to a storage: in *Theaetetus* 191c-d, Socrates introduces the **wax tablet** analogy, where impressions of perception are passively stored in the soul like seal imprints ²⁰. The soul at this vertex has *received* past experiences ($x=0$, passive) and those experiences are no longer present to the senses (hence invisible, $z=1$) but belong to what **has become** ($y=0$, still on the coming-to-be side, since once an experience *has come to be*, it enters the record of becoming). The Greek **γεγονώς** (“having become”) conveys that something *was made or happened* – e.g. an event now in memory is a *γεγονός*. The soul in this mode is like a repository of **pathémata** (affections). Importantly, at this point the soul has not *done* anything with these memories; it simply *has* them. Plato's *Theaetetus* later develops the **aviary model** (197c-e) to distinguish possessing a piece of knowledge in memory from actively recalling or using it ¹⁷. Passive What Was corresponds to merely *possessing* the content (the “birds” sit in the aviary of the mind). In sum, this position is the soul as **past experienter**: it holds what *was* (e.g. sights seen, lessons heard) in an unprocessed way. It is a distinct state because Plato considers mere memory (mneme) different from active recollection or understanding.

- **Active “What Was” (1,1,1):** Now the soul actively grapples with the past, making it meaningful. Greek **ἀναλογιζομένη** (from *αναλογίζομαι*, “to compute or proportion out”) nicely captures the act of *re-collecting* past impressions and relating them to each other. When the soul recollects (as in the Platonic doctrine of **ἀνάμνησις**), it *actively brings invisible knowledge to consciousness*. Here $x=1$ (active) and $z=1$ (the content remains invisible/intelligible – e.g. remembering an abstract lesson or form), and crucially $y=1$ (ceasing-to-be side) because the soul is dealing with things that *have come to be* and are *complete*. In fact, an *active recollection* treats the past event as a whole to be contemplated. Plato's *Phaedo* offers an example: seeing equal sticks triggers the active recollection of “the Equal itself” – the soul infers the form of Equality by analogical reasoning from memory ²¹ ²². In the *Theaetetus* aviary analogy, this is when the man reaches in and **catches** a bird (a piece of knowledge) – i.e. retrieves something he learned before ¹⁷. Thus, Active What Was is the soul *making sense* of memory, transforming latent impressions into understood truths. Plato gives technical importance to this: without the ability to *synthesize* past experiences, there would be no learning from experience. For example, *Theaetetus* 186c implies the mind compares a present thing with *past* ones and notes a difference or sameness – an active use of memory ²³. All such retrospection falls under this position. It is ontologically one of the most enriched states (1,1,1) because it unites the soul's activity, a determinate content, and an intelligible form. In effect, the soul is *knowing* something about “what was” in this mode (for instance, understanding a past event in hindsight, or abstracting a lasting principle from it).

- **Passive “What Is” (0,1,1):** This is the soul in the moment of *just experiencing the present*. Plato would describe this as **aisthesis** (perception) before any judgment. The soul is encountering a present reality ($y=1$, since what *is* in the immediate sense is on the threshold of ceasing – the present

instantly becomes past). It is also an **invisible** state ($z=1$) in an interesting way: the narrative describes “present appearance – now invisible, yet already formed.” This hints that the instant we register the present, it’s already slipping into memory (the *seen* is turning into an *unseen trace*). The soul’s stance is passive ($x=0$): it *suffers* (πάσχει) the impressions of the now. For example, at the instant of seeing a color or feeling a pain, the soul is at the mercy of that stimulus. Plato acknowledges this level in *Theaetetus* when discussing perception: e.g. “*the simple sensations which reach the soul through the body are given at birth by nature*”, and require no active thought ²⁴ ¹⁸. The soul at this vertex is essentially *undergoing reality*. Another way to frame this: it is the state of **pathos prior to logos**. In terms of Plato’s divided line, this could correspond to the immediate awareness of a phenomenon, not yet an opinion about it. It’s “what is” in the straightforward sense (the being that *is there* now), but the soul hasn’t shaped it. This position is necessary because it acknowledges, as Plato does, that cognition begins with *receptivity*. The soul must first receive the form of the Good’s imprint via perception before it can do anything else ⁹. We can think of Socrates’ description (at *Theaetetus* 187a) that knowledge is *not* these impressions themselves – implying these impressions (which are passive) precede knowledge. The **Passive What Is** is precisely that pre-cognitive presence.

- **Active “What Is” (1,1,0):** In this state, the soul **actively organizes the present, making it explicit and visible in form**. It has coordinates (1,1,0): active ($x=1$), dealing with a determinate situation ($y=1$, something that has taken shape or is in the moment of completion), and turning it into something **visible/shareable ($z=0$)**. The narrative aptly described this as the soul “*imposes voûs onto visible content through λόγος (διακοσμοῦν)*”. The Greek **διακοσμοῦν** means “adorning or arranging” – like the Demiurge arranging chaos into cosmos, or an orator arranging thoughts into speech. Here the soul takes what it perceives or intuits and actively gives it structure *in the external, manifest realm*. For instance, when a person *explains* what they presently see (“this is an oak tree, which means water is nearby”), they are turning a passive sight into an articulated understanding. Plato would call this **logos** – a rational account. In *Timaeus* 37c, the world-soul itself, when functioning properly, “*announces through the entire soul*” the account of a perceptible thing, resulting in “*opinions and beliefs ... certain and true*” ²⁵. That describes the soul actively making sense of a present perception, yielding a doxa that, if guided by nous, is true. Likewise, Socrates in *Theaetetus* insists that “*knowledge is not in the impressions, but in the reasoning about them*” ⁹ – effectively, Active What Is is that reasoning happening. We can also see this in dialectic: the moment the mind takes an observation and draws a conclusion, it has actively brought an invisible insight to a visible statement or conscious thought. Ontologically, this position is the closest to *fully realized knowledge* of sensible reality – one might call it the state of **episteme of the here-and-now**. It is “within the domain of ceasing-to-be” (because it fixes the present, which is transient), but it brings illumination to that domain. In sum, Active What Is corresponds to **nous bringing the present to light**, much as the Form of Good makes things knowable in the visible world (*Republic* VI).

- **Passive “What Is Not” (0,1,0):** This perhaps most paradoxical position acknowledges the soul’s encounter with **negation or absence**. In Plato’s ontology, “what is not” never means absolute nothing (since that cannot be an object of thought, per *Parmenides* and *Sophist*). Rather, “*not being*” is always relative – typically, *otherness*. At this position the soul is passively aware of something *missing* or *false*. For example, when one recognizes *ignorance* (a lack of knowledge) or perceives a hole in a pattern, one is *experiencing “what is not”*. The soul hasn’t yet actively identified it; it just senses a negation (like an aporia – a puzzlement where something doesn’t add up). The coordinates (0,1,0) show that the soul is passive ($x=0$) and that this concerns a definite context ($y=1$, since to say

something *is not*, we implicitly reference a stable idea that is absent), and visible ($z=0$) meaning this negation relates to the outward or explicit. For instance, “*the present sound is not meaningful*” – one passively hears noise and is struck by the absence of meaning. In Greek, we might denote the content as $\mu\eta\ \delta\upsilon$ (“what is not”). Plato gives a logical exposition of dealing with “the one that is not” in *Parmenides* 160b–d: even to speak or think of it, the soul must have *some* encounter with it. Indeed, *Parmenides* says “*when one says ‘if the one is not,’ one is saying that that which is not is something different ... and we know what he means*” ²⁶. This captures the passive *apprehension* of non-being: we somehow know “*what is not*” as a placeholder. Thus Passive What Is Not is a real position – the soul can be confronted with **non-being** (for example, encountering a logical contradiction or an unrealized possibility) and simply register it as an undefined other.

- **Active “What Is Not” (1,0,0):** Finally, the soul actively engages negation, turning absence into a defined *other*. This is the move of **distinction** or **negation proper**. Coordinates (1,0,0) indicate the soul is active ($x=1$), operating in the realm of generation or coming-to-be ($y=0$) – because by introducing a negation we actually allow something new to come to be (the concept “*not-X*” – a new determination) – and invisible ($z=0$) because this differentiation is initially a mental or conceptual act, though it delineates the visible. In simpler terms, *Active What Is Not* is the soul’s power to say “*X is not Y*”, thereby carving out a concept of Y’s absence. We see Plato discuss this power in the *Sophist* (where the Stranger explains that “*that which is not*” is just “*that which is other*” than a given thing – $\epsilon\tau\epsilon\rho\omicron\nu$, *Sophist* 257b). In *Parmenides* 160d, it’s asserted that “*there must be knowledge of the one that is not, otherwise we couldn’t even talk about it*” ²⁷, and that “*the one that is not has difference, besides there being knowledge of it*” ¹⁹. In effect, the soul supplies an identity to “what is not” by differentiating it from what *is*. For example, to understand darkness, the soul actively considers it as “not light” – an act of negation that defines darkness as an *other* rather than a mere void. This diagonal move (as we will see) crosses from passive awareness of a lack to active delineation of contrast. Plato considers this a legitimate cognitive act: $\mu\eta\ \delta\upsilon\nu\tau\alpha$ can be thought and spoken because the soul can always attach a negation to some idea and thereby refer to something intelligible (even if only an *other*). Active What Is Not thus describes the soul as **differentiator** – the creator of distinctions, the source of definition by negation. It “initiates structure by delimiting what something is not,” a step Plato sees as foundational for discourse and thought (without “not,” no contradiction, no distinction of concepts would be possible).

By enumerating these eight, we see how comprehensive the model is: it spans the soul’s engagement with **future, past, present, and negation**, each in passive and active modes. Each position indeed finds echoes in Platonic texts and doctrines. Moreover, the inclusion of “*what is not*” ($\mu\eta\ \delta\upsilon$) as a valid position is justified by Plato’s explicit arguments that we *can* and *do* think of what is not. In *Parmenides*, after a rigorous exercise, Plato concludes not only that “*the one that is not*” can be differentiated and known ¹⁹ ²⁷, but also that it can stand in relations and even have attributes like difference and likeness in certain respects ²⁸ ²⁹. Similarly, in *Sophist* (258d–e) he affirms that “*that which is not*” in the sense of “*other than being*” is an intelligible Other, not utter nothingness. Therefore, Position 7 (Passive What Is Not) and Position 8 (Active What Is Not) are philosophically legitimate: they correspond to how the soul encounters non-being first as an indeterminate *otherness* and then actively uses that to define and negate.

In summary, the eight positions exhaust the ways the soul can relate to states of temporal being: receiving or shaping; in the mode of coming-to-be or of completion; addressing what is available to sense or only to thought. Each is a “vertex” in Plato’s conceptual space, and none is superfluous – we have seen that omitting any one would ignore a distinct facet of cognitive life that Plato’s theory accounts for (for example,

omitting “What Is Not” would ignore how we handle falsity and absence, which Plato clearly addresses in his ontology of otherness). The stage is now set to investigate the **diagonal transitions** between these positions, which represent the dynamic “movements” of the soul within this cube of becoming.

4. Analysis of the Four Diagonals

Within the eightfold structure, we identify four especially meaningful **diagonal transitions**. Each diagonal connects a Passive state to an Active state within the same ontological category (i.e. within “What Is Not,” “What Will Be,” “What Was,” or “What Is”). Geometrically, in the cube model these are lines that cut across two axes at once (hence “diagonal” in a 3D sense). Conceptually, each represents the soul’s characteristic pathway of *ascent* from reception to rational organization **within a fixed temporal context**. These four diagonals correspond to the soul transforming **pathos into logos** under the conditions of (a) negation, (b) futurity, (c) past, and (d) present. We evaluate each diagonal for consistency with Platonic metaphysics and psychology, detailing the ontological shift and cognitive role, and highlighting Greek terminology where appropriate.

Figure: A cube representing the three ontological axes and four diagonal paths (D1–D4). Each diagonal connects a passive state (○) to an active state (●) within the same domain (“What Is Not,” “Will Be,” “Was,” “Is”). Axes: x = Active (0=Passive, 1=Active); y = Temporal (0=Becoming, 1=Ceasing/Complete); z = Visibility (0=Visible, 1=Invisible). Diagonals thus traverse two axes (dimensions) simultaneously.

Diagonal 1: Passive “What Is Not” → Active “What Is Not” (D1). This diagonal runs from (0,1,0) to (1,0,0). Ontologically, it crosses the **x-axis** from Passive to Active and the **y-axis** from Ceasing-to-be to Coming-to-be, while the z-axis remains at 0 (Visible). In concrete terms, the soul moves from *passively* recognizing a negation or absence (an unsynthesized “not-being” in the context of something that is or was) to *actively* delineating a negation (giving form to “what is not”). The cognitive role of this transition is **differentiation**. The soul takes an initial *pathos* – say, a sense that “X is not there” or “this is not true” – and *imposes a logical boundary*, articulating precisely what is absent or false. This is how the **νοῦς** responds to a privation: by introducing the concept of an *other*. In Greek terms, the soul goes from an encounter with **μὴ ὄντα** (things that are not, unspecifically) to establishing **τὸ ἕτερον** (Otherness) as a definite notion. Plato explicitly accounts for such a move in *Parmenides* and *Sophist*. In *Parmenides* 160c-d, for example, once we admit “the one is not,” we find that “*what is said not to be is nonetheless known, and also that it is distinct (different) from the others.*”¹⁹ Immediately after, the dialogue states, “*So, we must say from the beginning, if the one is not, this follows: first, that there is knowledge of it....*”²⁷ This is remarkable: even to conceive “X is not,” the soul must actively supply an idea of “X” and hold it apart from others. Thus diagonal D1 is exemplified: the soul *actively gives shape to non-being by differentiation*.

In Platonic metaphysics, this is the foundation of false judgment and negation. The *Sophist* (257b-e) famously declares Not-Being to be “*nothing else but otherness (ἕτερον)*” relative to being. When the soul judges “This is not Y,” it in effect assigns the thing to a different category. For instance, if I say “*Theaetetus is not flying,*” I compare Theaetetus’s state to the predicate “flying,” find an absence, and actively negate, effectively saying Theaetetus is **other** than any flying thing. The passive awareness might simply be the visual absence of winged motion; the active negation is the thought “he is not flying.” This diagonal transition aligns perfectly with that process. It is consistent with Plato’s view that thinking the negation of something is still thinking *something*. The soul doesn’t embrace nihilism; rather, it “*turns absence into conceptual structure.*” This diagonal reflects **nous** transforming the **pathos of privation** into **logos of difference**. Without such a movement, Plato could not explain how we speak meaningfully of what is not (a

challenge raised in *Parmenides* and solved by distinguishing types of “is not”). In short, D1 is validated by Plato’s insight that the soul can only handle “what is not” by *actively drawing distinctions*. The result of diagonal 1 is that the “Passive What Is Not” (an indeterminate not-being) is elevated to “Active What Is Not” – a determinate negation, which is the basis of **logos** in arguments (e.g. identifying what a thing is by clarifying what it is *not*). This is fundamental in dialectic and definition throughout Plato’s dialogues.

Diagonal 2: Passive “What Will Be” → Active “What Will Be” (D2). This diagonal connects (0,0,0) to (1,0,1), crossing the **x-axis** (Passive→Active) and the **z-axis** (Visible→Invisible), while staying on the y-axis at 0 (Coming-to-be). The soul here moves from a passive openness toward the future to an active **projection of the future**. Ontologically, the soul remains oriented to what is in a state of becoming (the future, as-yet-unrealized); epistemically, it shifts from not having any internal content (visible 0) to generating an inner image or plan (invisible 1). The cognitive role of D2 is **anticipation** or **forethought**. We see this described in *Theaetetus* 186b, where Theaetetus notes that the mind “*reflects within itself upon the past and present with an eye to the future.*”⁷ The phrase “*with an eye to the future*” (προορωμένη προς τὸ μέλλον) indicates the mind’s active visualization of what **will be**. The Greek term **προορώμενος** (proorōmenos, “foreseeing”) encapsulates this move – it is the participle used to describe *nous* in its future-oriented mode. Plato attributes this faculty especially to the rational soul or the expert: e.g. in *Statesman* (260d) the true statesman’s knowledge includes **πρόνοια** (foresight) of the city’s future conditions, and in *Theaetetus* (187e) the difference between mere perception and judgment is that judgment can pertain to what is not presently seen, including future predictions.

When the soul is in Passive “What Will Be,” it simply *faces* the openness of the future – similar to a person having a perception of possibilities but no conscious plan. The diagonal to Active “What Will Be” is the moment of **shaping a mental model of the future**. For instance, think of an archer imagining the arrow’s arc before releasing the bow: initially he just senses the tension and possibility (passive openness), then he actively calculates the trajectory (projecting an invisible line of flight – an image in the mind). Plato’s Demiurge itself moves somewhat like this: seeing that all things should become good, the Demiurge devises the structure of the cosmos as it “*was going to be*” – effectively a providential plan (*Timaeus* 30a-b). Another down-to-earth example: when a doctor predicts how a disease will develop, she uses present symptoms (visible) to envision the coming progression (an “invisible” scenario in her mind). The diagonal is precisely that jump from data to hypothetical outcome.

This diagonal is consistent with Platonic psychology because Plato often praises **νοῦς** as that which *guides future action* by looking ahead. In the simile of the charioteer (*Phaedrus* 253d-e), reason anticipates and directs the horses – a metaphor for foresight guiding passions. The cognitive importance of D2 is that it converts the mere potential of the future into an *intentional object* the soul can work with. By traversing from a passive to an active-invisible state, the soul effectively *creates a future intention or prediction*. The result is akin to what Plato in *Theaetetus* associates with wisdom: “**considering what is to come**” as part of true judgment⁷. Thus, diagonal 2 illustrates *nous* turning the **pathos of uncertainty** (just waiting for what will happen) into the **logos of expectation** (a reasoned expectation of what will happen). It showcases the soul’s role as a *planner* in the realm of becoming – a role Plato consistently attributes to rational insight.

Diagonal 3: Passive “What Was” → Active “What Was” (D3). This diagonal goes from (0,0,1) to (1,1,1), crossing **x-axis** (Passive→Active) and **y-axis** (Coming-to-be→Ceasing-to-be), while z remains 1 (Invisible). The soul moves from passively *holding* past impressions to actively *reconfiguring* and understanding them. Ontologically, it leaves the realm of ongoing flux (y=0) and enters the realm of what is completed and fixed (y=1) – because to actively make sense of the past, the soul treats those experiences as definite *wholes* or

completed facts. Epistemically, the content stays invisible ($z=1$) throughout, as memories and their meanings are inward. The cognitive role of this diagonal is **recollection, interpretation, and synthesis** of memory – essentially the process of deriving knowledge from past experience. In Greek, we might say the soul goes from mere **μνήμη** (memory) to **ἀνάμνησις** (recollection in the strong sense, or rediscovery of knowledge). The participle **ἀναλογιζομένη** (“analogizing” or “reckoning by analogy”) was offered for Active “What Was” because the soul often understands the past by *relating* its parts or relating past to present through analogies. Plato’s epistemology in the *Meno* and *Phaedo* famously asserts that learning is *recollection* – the soul actively recovering knowledge it already *has* implicitly from past incarnations. Even outside that metaphysical doctrine, Plato recognizes that any *understanding* of what has happened involves an active organizing (in *Theaetetus* 191e-192b, he notes we have to match perceptions to memory imprints, and we can get it wrong or right – implying an active effort to recall correctly ²⁰).

A clear illustration is the *Theaetetus*’ **aviary model**, where the soul stocked with memories (birds) must actively catch the right bird to *use* the knowledge ¹⁷ ³⁰ . Passive “What Was” is like having an aviary full of birds (knowledge pieces one passively acquired); Active “What Was” is going in and grabbing the correct bird (choosing and combining knowledge actively). Socrates says this explicitly: “*having learned and remembered something, can a man fail to know it when he remembers? Impossible...thus knowledge is not the impressions themselves but in the process of recollecting or reasoning about them.*” ³¹ ⁸ . The *process* he hints at is precisely this diagonal.

We see this in practice whenever Plato’s Socrates helps someone recall a definition: he doesn’t stuff new data in; he asks questions that make the person *re-examine* what they already think (past impressions) and find a rational pattern. Consider the slave boy in the *Meno*: at first the boy has passive memories of geometry lessons (rough notions), but through questioning he actively recollects the Pythagorean theorem structure. By the end, the boy has *synthesized* the past data points into a coherent knowledge of the square’s diagonal property (literally, he recollects the diagonal-based solution to doubling the square!). Plato frames this as the soul moving from opinion to knowledge by working through memory.

Diagonal 3 thus encapsulates a core Platonic idea: **meaning-making from memory**. It is fully consistent with Plato’s metaphysics of learning. The soul takes what is *given in memory* (pathos stored as in wax or aviary) and by crossing to the active and completed side, it achieves **logos** about the past – e.g. historical insight, understanding of causes, recognition of Forms previously latent. Greek terminology: **γεγονός** (that which has come into being) passively sits in memory until **ἀναλογισμός** (rational recollection) turns it into **γνώσις** (knowledge). In doing so, the soul’s **nous** transforms the **pathos of memory** into **the logos of understanding**. This gradual crossing of two axes (becoming→being and passive→active) aligns with how Plato often describes enlightenment as a turning around of the soul (a diagonal turn, one might say, combining a change in state *and* an internal action). Therefore, D3 is both metaphysically and psychologically a natural Platonic move: the ascent from mere perception of what *was* (which by itself yields no certainty) to a reasoned account of what *was* (which can yield truth, e.g. in historiography or in personal wisdom).

Diagonal 4: Passive “What Is” → Active “What Is” (D4). The last diagonal spans from (0,1,1) to (1,1,0), crossing **x-axis** (Passive→Active) and **z-axis** (Invisible→Visible), while **y** remains at 1 (Ceasing-to-be, i.e. the context of a present that is solidifying into the past). The soul moves from a passive, implicit absorption of the present reality to an active, explicit articulation or ordering of that reality. Ontologically it stays in the realm of the “what is / has just become” ($y=1$): the domain of facts or beings that have taken shape (in the present or just now). The key change is along the **z-axis**: from invisible to visible. This signifies that whatever

understanding was *tacit* or not yet expressed (in the passive state) becomes *made manifest*, typically in speech, action, or clear thought (active state). The cognitive role of D4 is **illumination and expression** – we can think of it as the soul **bringing to light** what it implicitly knows or sees. Plato might also frame it as **rational articulation (logos) of the perceptual world**. The Greek **διακοσμοῦν** (“arranging/ordering”) is apt, since the soul here actively *orders* the content of the present, literally making a *cosmos* (an ordered whole) out of what was a raw experience.

We find support for this in *Timaeus* 37e-38b, where Plato describes how, whenever the world-soul’s rational circuit of the Same runs smoothly concerning intelligibles, it produces **nous** and knowledge, and whenever the circuit of the Other runs concerning perceptibles, it produces **true opinions** throughout the soul ²⁵. But importantly, the text says these accounts (logoi) are “borne along without sound or speech in the self-moved soul” ⁵ until the moment they are *announced* (when the circle of Other interacts with the whole soul). This implies that the soul can silently form a rational ordering (passive inexpressible insight) and then *announce* it, i.e. make it explicit. D4 captures that two-step: a presently given truth moves from implicit understanding to an explicit statement or structured knowledge. Likewise, in Socratic dialogues, someone might *sense* a contradiction but cannot put it into words until Socrates helps articulate it – going from an unspoken awareness to a spoken conclusion.

The shift from Invisible to Visible (z-axis) in D4 can also be understood metaphorically via Plato’s allegory of the Cave (*Republic* VII). When the prisoner turns toward the light (gains insight) and eventually ascends out (sees the real sun/Good), he then tries to go back and **tell** the others – to *make visible* to them what he saw intellectually. His internal vision must be converted to shared logos. In the context of our cube, that conversion is an active one (x-axis) that takes an invisible insight (z=1) into the realm of communication or demonstrable clarity (z=0). We also see D4 in every dialectical breakthrough: e.g. when Theaetetus finally formulates a definition of knowledge after much wordless puzzlement, or when the interlocutors in *Republic* realize what justice is and then articulate it in the structure of the kallipolis.

From a metaphysical perspective, Active “What Is” is the closest thing to **true knowledge of the sensory world** in Plato – often equivalent to right opinion with an account (*Meno* 98a). It’s stable (y=1) and it’s manifest (z=0), meaning it can be taught or shown. Passive “What Is” by itself would be just fleeting perceptions without understanding. By traversing D4, nous takes those perceptions and *shines the light of reason on them*, arranging them into a coherent, visible structure (like a scientific explanation or a crafted object). The Demiurge arranging chaotic matter into the ordered cosmos is again an illustrative parallel: before, there was an invisible plan in the divine mind (passive what is, perhaps, as it beheld the model); after, there is a visible world arranged with intelligible structure (active what is). The Demiurge’s action *διακοσμῶν* (“ordering the world”) ³² is literally an **active imposition of order on the present state** of the receptacle, turning it into the visible cosmic order.

Therefore, diagonal 4 is in line with Plato’s depiction of the highest cognitive states in relation to empirical reality: the move from **perception (aisthesis) to knowledge (episteme)**. Socrates succinctly puts it as “*joining reason with perception*” to achieve truth ⁸. Nous here transforms the **pathos of immediate experience** into the **logos of explicated truth**. It’s how the Form of the Good enables the mind to “render the things seen knowable” (cf. *Republic* 509b ¹ – the Good gives truth to the things known, making them “visible” to intellect). In sum, D4 is thoroughly Platonic: it mirrors the enlightenment process and the communicative aspect of knowledge in Plato’s work.

Having examined each diagonal, we note a common pattern: each involves the soul **crossing two ontological axes at once**, embodying Plato's idea that learning or changing understanding requires a significant reorientation, not a tiny step. Yet none crosses *all three* axes at once – reflecting Plato's sense of developmental order. The soul doesn't leap from pure ignorance to complete knowledge in one go; it moves through intermediate tensions (e.g. first grasping difference, then using that to define; or first recalling pieces, then synthesizing them). This gradualism is consistent with Plato's epistemology (as in the divided line's segments, or the ladder of love in *Symposium* – one ascends in stages).

Furthermore, in every diagonal the soul's **nous** is effectuating a transformation of a **pathos**: from undefined absence to defined otherness (D1), from mere possibility to imagined reality (D2), from stored impression to recollected meaning (D3), and from raw perception to rational account (D4). This indeed validates the hypothesis that *diagonal movement reflects nous transforming pathos into logos within each ontological domain*. Each diagonal we identified shows *reason actively reorganizing what was passively received*, within the bounds of “the Same context” (either the context of non-being, future, past, or present). This is highly consistent with Platonic psychology – Plato frequently describes the soul as initially passive (receiving sensations, experiencing confusion or lack) and then through reasoning, turning that into understanding or true belief. The four diagonals we've outlined are essentially archetypes of that process.

To ensure clarity, one can imagine each diagonal as the soul's path in a given scenario:

- D1 is trodden whenever we correct a false belief or distinguish a concept (the soul realizes “X is not Y” and thereby learns what X is or is-not) – something Plato's dialectic does constantly by refutation and definition.
- D2 is trodden whenever we make a plan or prediction (the soul takes experience and projects, as the philosopher-kings in *Republic* are trained to do, looking to the Form of the Good to decide future governance).
- D3 is trodden whenever we learn from the past (the soul recollects, connects ideas – the very method of hypothesis in *Phaedo* or the historical review in *Laws* to derive lessons).
- D4 is trodden whenever we articulate a coherent worldview or solve a perceptual puzzle (like the astronomer who sees wandering stars and deduces the harmonic orbits – turning observations into knowledge).

Finally, it's worth noting that the notion of “diagonal” movement carries the connotation of an *indirect but more penetrating* route. Plato could have had the world-soul's motion of Difference simply at another right angle, but he chose “diagonal,” hinting at something that goes through the middle of things (a diagonal of a square goes through its interior, not along the edges). Likewise, the soul's diagonal cognitive movements penetrate the interior of the ontological “cube” of becoming – they are not superficial changes, but deep structururations that connect different aspects of being.

In conclusion, analyzing Plato's texts through this three-axis, eight-position model not only illuminates the specific passages (from *Timaeus*, *Theaetetus*, *Parmenides*, etc.) but also provides a unified geometric metaphor for Plato's theory of the soul. The World Soul's diagonal motion is more than cosmology: it allegorizes how **nous** (rational intellect) must move obliquely through the realms of becoming to bring about **kosmos** (order) in both the universe and in thought. Each diagonal path is a manifestation of the

soul's rational faculty organizing the flux – the very process by which the soul “weaves together” the Same and the Different, generating the tapestry of knowledge and meaning. Thus, the diagonal movement of the soul across the ontological cube is a powerful image of *how the soul traverses the landscape of being*, converting passive encounters into active understanding – an image entirely in harmony with the Platonic vision of a rationally ordered cosmos and a soul that can, by degrees, come to mirror that order ¹¹ ³³ .

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