



The Philosophy of Plato

Albert Stöckl

The [doctrines of Socrates] formed the basis of [Plato's] philosophic system; but he did not confine himself to these; he borrowed also from Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, and Parmenides, such notions as he found suitable to his purpose. But Plato did not merely collect and reproduce for us the opinions of these philosophers, he constructed for himself an original philosophy. The final results of the philosophical investigations of others he took only as the materials for the structure which he had planned in his own mind. The prominent feature of his philosophy is its thoroughly ideal character. "As the blood," says a modern writer, "flows from the heart to all parts of the body, and returns to the heart again, so in the Platonic philosophy everything proceeds from the Idea as from a centre, and everything returns thither again." Hence the great wealth of material which we observe in the Platonic Philosophy. With this wealth of material is united a grace of style and of exposition which has never been surpassed.

Life of Plato

Plato was born at Athens, B.C. 425. He was originally named Aristocles. He was the son of Aristo, a descendant of Codrus, and of Perictione, who was a descendant of Dropides — a near relative of Solon, and who was also a cousin of Cretias, one of the Thirty Tyrants. He is said to have devoted himself to poetry in his youth, a statement which the graceful style of his later writings renders probable. The weakness of his voice rendered him unfit for the duties of the public speaker. The stories regarding his military service rest on slender foundation. He appears to have pursued philosophical investigations at the same time that he was cultivating the poetic art, for he made acquaintance with Cratylus while still a youth, and learned from him the doctrines of Heraclitus. But Socrates seems to have been the first to give an entirely new direction to his efforts. He was twenty years old when he attached himself to Socrates, and he continued till the death of his master to enjoy the benefit of his teaching, and to be ranked among the most faithful and most esteemed of the philosopher's disciples.

After the death of Socrates, Plato, with some other disciples of the philosopher, joined Euclid at Megara. His intimacy with Euclid must have exercised considerable influence on the system formed by Plato. After his stay at Megara he undertook his first great journey (probably not before returning to Athens and sojourning for some time in that city). He visited Cyrene in Africa, and there made acquaintance with the mathematician Theodorus. He next proceeded to Egypt to pursue the study of Mathematics and Astronomy under its priests, and thence he continued his journey to Asia Minor. After another sojourn at Athens, he undertook, at the age of forty, a journey into Italy, to make acquaintance with the Pythagoreans. Thence he travelled to Sicily, where he formed a close intimacy with Dion, brother-in-law of the tyrant Dionysius the Elder. His moral admonitions are said to have provoked the tyrant himself to such a degree that he induced the Spartan envoy, Pollis, to sell the philosopher into slavery, as a prisoner of war. He was ransomed by Anniceris, and returned to Athens, where he founded, B.C. 387, his

school of philosophy in the garden of Academus (Academy). His teachings as we observe in his writings, and as we learn from an express statement in the [Phaedrus] (p. 275), took the form of dialogue; though he seems, at a later period, especially for his more advanced pupils, to have delivered sustained discourses.

In the year B.C. 367, after the death of Dionysius the elder, Plato undertook another journey to Sicily. He did so at the suggestion of Dion, who hoped that the teaching of Plato would influence the new ruler of Syracuse, Dionysius the Younger, and would help to induce a change in the government of Sicily to the aristocratic form. The plan failed owing to the weak and sensual temperament of Dionysius; he suspected Dion of aiming at the sovereign power, and he condemned him to exile. In these circumstances Plato could no longer maintain his position, and he therefore returned once more to Athens. He visited Sicily a third time in B.C. 361, in the hope of effecting a reconciliation between Dionysius and Dion. But he failed in his purpose. His own life was in peril from the suspicions of the tyrant, and he owed his safety to the interposition of the Pythagorean, Archytas of Tarentum. Returning to Athens he again began to teach by writings and oral instruction, and to this task he devoted the remainder of his life. He died at the age of eighty-one in the year B.C. 348 (or 347).

Works of Plato

The works of Plato, which have come down to us, consist of thirty-six treatises, (the letters being counted as one), besides which others, pronounced spurious by the ancients, bear his name. Aristophanes of Byzantium, a grammarian of Alexandria, divided a certain number of the treatises of Plato into five trilogies, and the neo-Pythagorean Thrasyllus (of the time of the Emperor Tiberius), divided the treatises which he accepted as genuine into nine trilogies.” In recent times many hypotheses have been framed regarding the order, and the succession in time of the dialogues of Plato. The most important theories on this point are those of Schleiermacher, Hermann, and Munk. (a) Schielermacher assumes that Plato had a definite plan of instruction before him when composing his several works (his occasional treatises excepted), and that they were composed in the order required by this plan. He accordingly divides them into three groups: elementary dialogues, mediatory dialogues, and constructive dialogues. In the first group he sets down as the leading dialogues: [Phaedrus, Protagoras,] and [Parmenides,] subsidiary dialogues, [Lysis, Laches, Charmides, Euthyphro,] occasional treatises, the [Apology] of Socrates and [Crito,] partly or wholly spurious, [Io, Hippias II., Hipparchus, Minos, Alcibiades II.]. To the second group he assigns as the leading dialogues: [Theaetetus, Sophistes, Politicus, Phaedo, Philebus,] subsidiary dialogues: [Gorgias, Meno, Euthydemus, Cratylus,] the [Banquet,] partly or wholly spurious, [Theages, Erastae, Alcibiades I., Menexenus, Hippias I., Clitophro.] To the third group belong as leading dialogues: The [Republic, Timaeus, Critias,] and, as subsidiary dialogue, the [Laws.]

(b) On the other hand, K. F. Hermann maintains that there is no single plan traceable in Plato's works, that they are merely the expression of the philosophical development of his own mind. He fixes, therefore, in the literary career of Plato three periods, each of which has its distinguishing characteristics. The first period extends to the death of Socrates; the second covers the time of Plato's stay at Megara, and includes his subsequent travels in Egypt and Asia Minor; the third begins with Plato's return from his first visit to Sicily, and ends with his death. He assigns to the first period the dialogues: [Hippias II., Io, Alcibiades I., Charmides, Lysis, Laches, Protagoras, Euthydemus,] and to the “transition stage” between the first and second periods: the [Apology, Crito, Gorgias, Euthyphro, Meno, Hippias I.] To the second period he assigns the dialogues: [Cratylus, Theaetetus, Sophistes, Politicus, Parmenides,] to the third:

[Phaedrus, Menexenus,] the [Banquet, Phaedo, Philebus,] the [Republic, Timaeus, Critias,] and the [Laws.]

(c) Munk is of opinion that Plato in his writings followed an order ideally representing the life of Socrates, the genuine philosopher, and that this order portrayed the several stages of the life of Socrates. Accordingly he distinguishes three series of treatises: (alpha) corresponding to Socrates' devoting himself to philosophy, and his attacks upon the current false teaching (B.C. 389-384); [Parmenides, Protagoras, Charmides, Laches, Gorgias, Hippias I., Cratylus, Euthydemus,] the [Banquet,] (beta) corresponding to Socrates' teaching of true wisdom (B.C. 383-370): [Phaedrus, Philebus, Republic, Timaeus, Critias,] (gamma) corresponding to Socrates' defence of his own teaching by criticism of rival schools, and to his death (after B.C. 370): [Meno, Theaetetus, Sophistes, Politicus, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo.].

The controversy regarding the arrangement and succession in time of Plato's dialogues is not yet ended; no certain result has yet been obtained. It seems to us that the hypothesis of Hermann is the simplest and most natural; all the more than there is observable in the dialogues of Plato an unmistakable development of philosophic thought. Whether the classification given by Hermann is perfect in all its details, may be left an open question. Without attempting to discuss it, we shall indicate briefly the substance of the several dialogues, adopting the order suggested by Hermann.

First series: [Hippias II.] treats of Free Will in Wrong-doing; [Io,] of Inspiration and Reflection; [Alcibiades I.,] of Human Nature; [Charmides,] of the virtue of Temperance; [Lysis,] of Friendship; [Laches,] of Courage; [Protagoras,] of Virtue — it is directed against the Sophists; [Euthydemus,] is a treatise on the same subject; the [Apology] of Socrates is a defence of that philosopher against his accusers; [Crito] treats of Right Action; [Gorgias] is a discussion upon Rhetoric, and a condemnation of the abuse of it by the Sophists; [Euthyphro] treats of Holiness; [Meno] of Virtue, and the possibility of its being taught; [Hippias I.] is directed against the Sophists.

In the second series: [Cratylus] contains philosophical investigations on Language; [Theaetetus] is an inquiry into the nature of Knowledge; it is chiefly a refutation of the Sophists, and contains little positive teaching; [Sophistes] is a treatise on the concept of Being; [Politicus] on the Statesman, what he should know, and how he should act; [Parmenides] treats of Ideas, and the notion of the One.

In the third series: [Phaedrus] treats of Love, and the Beautiful as the object of love; [Menexenus] of the Useful; the [Banquet] again of Love; [Phaedo] of the Soul and Immortality; [Philebus] of the Good, more particularly of the Supreme Good; the [Republic] is a treatise on Political Philosophy, but the ten books of which it is composed contain many important questions of large philosophic interest; [Timaeus] is a treatise on Cosmogony; [Critias] is a pretended history of primeval political institutions; the [Laws,] a treatise, in twelve books, on the State; not an inquiry as to the best possible (ideal) state, like the [Republic] ([politeia]) but a discussion as to that State which will best suit certain given conditions. (The genuineness of the [Meno] and [Epinomis,] which treat of Laws, is disputed.)....

Approach to Philosophy

Philosophy, according to Plato, is the science of the Unconditioned and the Unchangeable — of that which is the basis of all phenomena. The Unconditioned and the Unchangeable are for him the ideas of things, for these he holds to be really existent (*ontôs ôn*) and thus to stand in contrast with the changeable fleeting things of the phenomenal world. Accordingly he holds Philosophy, rightly defined, to be the science of Ideas, the science of the really existent. But Philosophy is

not mere theory, in Plato's estimate, it essentially includes a practical element also; it directs the whole man, Reason and Will alike, towards the Ideal, and is thus the complement of man's intellectual and moral life. Perfect wisdom belongs to God alone; man can only be a striver after wisdom (*philosophos*), his business is to approach ever nearer and nearer to the perfect wisdom of God. This effort must spring from a love of the Good and the Beautiful, and from wonder at the great phenomena which the objective order of things sets before the mind as so many problems to solve. These feelings give rise to a desire for a certain knowledge of the ultimate reasons of all things, and all phenomena, and thus the efforts of the philosopher are called forth.

Plato distinguishes between Philosophy and the preparatory sciences. Among the latter he reckons Mathematics. The science of Mathematics is not a part of philosophy; for it assumes certain notions and certain principles without giving any account of them, taking them as if they were evident to all — a proceeding which philosophy as a pure science cannot admit. Furthermore it makes use, in its demonstrations, of visible images, though it does not treat of these, but of something which the mind alone perceives. It stands, therefore, midway between mere correct opinion and science; clearer than the one, more obscure than the other. But though Mathematics is not philosophy, it is nevertheless an indispensable means for training the mind to philosophical thought, a necessary step to knowledge, without which no one can become a philosopher. It is, in a certain sense, the vestibule of philosophy.

The *organon* proper of philosophical knowledge is Dialectic. Dialectic is the art of reducing what is multiple and manifold in our experience to unity in one concept, and of establishing an organic order and interdependence among the concepts so acquired. The dialectician is skilled to discover the several single concepts which underlie the many and varying objects of our cognition, and to arrange and classify these concepts according to their mutual relations. In the latter process the method he follows will be either the analytical method — proceeding from below upwards, or the synthetical — proceeding from above downwards. Dialectic will thus include the twofold process — ascent from the particular to the general, and descent from the general to the particular.

How and to what extent this Dialectic is the *organon* — the operative factor in philosophical knowledge — we find indicated in the relations which, according to Plato, subsist between the concepts to which it leads, and Ideas — the really existent entities, which are the proper object of philosophy. Ideas are the objects of these concepts; in forming these concepts we are apprehending in them the ideas of things — we are apprehending the really existent, and are arriving at the knowledge which is the ultimate end of all the efforts of the philosopher. Dialectic is thus the real organon, the vivifying centre of all philosophy. Hence it is that Plato not unfrequently uses Dialectic and Philosophy as synonymous terms.

Mythical notions prepare the way for dialectical knowledge, and, where it fails, come in to supplement it. The myth is an aid to the mind in its efforts to form right conceptions, but it is, in itself, an imperfect way of representing things; the dialectical method is the only method which leads to philosophical knowledge. The myth must, however, be appealed to when dialectical knowledge is either unattainable, or very difficult of attainment. Plato himself makes use largely of the mythical form in his expositions; he very frequently introduces the ancient myths and legends in order to state his theories through them. To this circumstance the charm of his writings is largely due.

With regard to the division of the Platonic philosophy, we find that Cicero (*Acad. post.* I., 5, 19) ascribes to Plato himself the division into Dialectics, Physics, and Ethics. According to Sextus Empiricus (*adv. Math.* VII., 16), this division was formally made by Plato's disciple Xenocrates, though Plato may be considered to have virtually established it himself. If this

division is not expressly mentioned in Plato's writings, it is nevertheless practically adopted in his exposition of his theories. It will, therefore, be the most suitable for us to follow in setting forth Plato's doctrines. As, however, we have already indicated the general character of the Platonic Dialectic, it only remains for us to set forth, under the first head, Plato's theory of Ideas — the central doctrine of the Dialectic, and indeed of the entire Platonic philosophy, and his theory of Knowledge. We shall therefore treat in order, first, Plato's theory of Ideas, in conjunction with his theory of Knowledge, which arises out of it, and depends on it; next, his Physics; and finally his Ethics, in which we shall include his Political Philosophy.

Plato's Doctrine of Ideas and Theory of Knowledge.

It is, as we have seen, the function of Dialectic to form general (or universal) Notions, and to reduce them, when formed, to organic arrangement, in accordance with their mutual relations. The objects responding to these general notions are *Ideas*. By immediate apprehension we have knowledge of the individual object; by the concept we have knowledge of the *Idea*. The question naturally presents itself, — how are we to conceive of these Ideas in their objective state, and what relations are we to conceive them as holding to individual objects, and to God? Plato's manner of answering these questions determines the fundamental character of his whole philosophy.

To the first question: how we are to conceive of the Ideas in their objective existence? Plato replies:

(a) The objective correlatives of the Universal Concepts given in our thought, are Universal Ideas. The Universal, as such, is not therefore a mere product of dialectical thought; as Universal, it is objectively real. To the Universal in thought corresponds an Universal in objective reality, and this objective Universal is the Idea. In this wise Plato gives objective existence to the Idea not only as regards the things it represents, but also as regards the form of universality which belongs to our thought of these things — to our concept.

(b) This being so, Universal Ideas are not something indwelling in individual objects, *i.e.*, an Idea is not the *essentia* which enters into the being of the several individuals of the same species; since it is Universal, it must be held to transcend all merely individual objects. Universal Ideas, as such, have therefore an independent existence apart from the world of phenomena; the true essences of things represented in these Ideas have being above and apart from things as they exist individually. In a word, we must admit a world of Ideas, distinguished from and transcending the world of phenomena.

(c) The mutual relations subsisting between these transcendental Universal Ideas are the same as the relations subsisting between the corresponding general notions in our thought. As general notions form, in thought, a logical unity, so do the Ideas corresponding to them enter into union in the objective order. But this union is not like the One Being of Parmenides, a lifeless, motionless thing; it involves a dialectical movement towards plurality. As in the process of our thought our concepts are differentiated, and thereby pass from the universal to the particular, so in the objective order of Ideas there is a differentiation of the Universal and the One into the Many. To every Idea belongs "identity with another thing", *i.e.*, it is a member in one Unity of Ideal Being; to every Idea belongs also "difference from other things" (*Thateron*), it carries within it a determinate character which distinguishes it from other Ideas, and by which it becomes other than these. The world of Ideas must therefore be regarded as unity in plurality, and plurality in unity. To admit unity without plurality would be to involve ourselves inextricably in contradiction; to admit plurality without unity would lead to a like result. Reason requires that we should assume both. (Parmenides, p. 137, s. 99; Sophist., p.

254, s. 99).

3. Turning now to the second question: How Plato understands the individual objects of the phenomenal world to be related to the Ideas, we find his teaching to be as follows:

(a) Ideas alone have real being; they alone are perfect, unchangeable, enduring, eternal, imperishable. Unchanging in itself, the ideal world moves in viewless majesty above the world of phenomena, representing within itself the full perfection of Being. The phenomenal world, on the other hand, is the sphere of imperfection, of change, of transition, the region where things exist in time, and begin to be. The existence of material things is a perpetual flux, there is nothing fixed or permanent in them; they are always passing out of existence. In the material world all things oscillate between Being and Non-being. Nothing ever attains perfection, for at each moment things cease to be what they were a moment before. All things are at the transition point from Being to Non-being, and from Non-being to Being; they are, and are not, at the same time. It follows that there can be no question here of Being in its perfection.

(b) Ideas, and the objects of the phenomenal world, are here set in contrast; they have, however, contact with one another (*koinônia*). The individual objects of the phenomenal order have part in the Ideas (*metechousi*), each individual object has part in the Idea corresponding to it, and this participation makes it to be what it is (Phaed., p. 101). The Idea is as the real essence of the object; it follows that the object becomes the thing it is only by participating in the Idea corresponding to it. Thus it is that participation in these Ideas determines the proper being of individual objects, as well as the characteristics which distinguish them from one another. In this way things are good in the visible world by participation in the self-subsistent Good, beautiful by participation in self-subsistent Beauty, wise, holy, just, by participation in self-subsistent Wisdom, Holiness, Justice. (Phaed. 100, 6. sqq.; Meno. p. 73, &c.)

(c) But in what consists this participation (*metechein*)? According to Plato it consists in “imitation” (*homoiôsis*) by the phenomenal objects of the corresponding Ideas. The Ideas are the models, the prototypes (*paradeigmata*); phenomenal objects are the copies, ectypes (*eidôla homoiômata*) of these models. The Ideas reflect themselves in the objects as in so many mirrors, and by this reflection of themselves manifest their existence. But this reflection of the Ideas is all the while very imperfect. Sensible objects reproduce but imperfectly the models they represent. Ideas are reflected in them as in a

dimmed mirror. For, in the first place, Matter is not in itself capable reflecting the Idea in its fulness; and in the second place, the process of continual change which involves all things of the phenomenal world in a constant movement of generation and decay, disturbs the clearness of the representation. There is, therefore, no comparison possible between the lustre and grandeur of the Idea in itself, and the copy of it which appears in the world of phenomena. In the supersensible world all is pure and unclouded; in the sensible world, all is dimness and confusion. In the one we have completeness and perfection, in the other incompleteness and imperfection. Phenomenal objects hold, therefore, an intermediate position between Being and Non-being. They are inasmuch as they participate in real Being; they *are not* inasmuch as they participate in it imperfectly. They do not, however, stand without the realm of Being, for Being is present to them (*parousia*) as their true essence, even though it be not indwelling (immanent) in them.

4. To our third question: What are the relations of these Ideas to God, Plato’s writings furnish this answer: (a) The Idea of God seems in the mind of Plato — as far at least as his doctrine rests on mere Dialectic — to have been one with the Idea of the Good. To the Idea of the Good, as to every other Idea, he attributes real being, but he does not identify it with the other Ideas. It is not a logico-metaphysical unit including all Ideas; no trace of such a conception is to be found in the teachings of Plato. On the contrary, he assigns to the Idea of the Good a transcendental

position above all other Ideas. The oneness of an Idea Plato describes as *ousia*, meaning thereby that the Idea is the true essence (*ousia*) of the objects of sense; but he states expressly that the Idea of the Good is not the *ousia* itself, but is of a higher order. (De Rep. VI. p. 508, VII. p. 517). He makes the Idea of the Good the sun of his world of Ideas. As the sun in this visible world not only renders things visible, but furthermore causes their generation, growth, and continued existence, without however being generated itself, so the Idea of the Good not 'only makes knowable all things that are known, but gives them also Being and Essence, not however becoming itself this Being or Essence, but surpassing them immeasurably in dignity and power. (De Rep. VI. 506-510, VII. p. 517, p. 540, p. 532.)

(b) Respecting the relations established by Plato between the Ideas of mundane things and the Idea of the Good, *i.e.*, the Idea of God, two distinct views have prevailed. Aristotle asserts that Plato established a difference between the Ideas of things and the things themselves, and then attributed to the Ideas, thus isolated, independent existence; and on the strength of this interpretation he sets himself to combat this theory of separation (*chôrisein*). According to this interpretation, Plato not only assigns to Ideas an existence transcending all individual objects, but he gives them furthermore subsistence apart from the being of God. The later scholastic philosophers have, as a rule, adopted this interpretation. On the other hand, hardly any of the earlier Christian exponents of Plato's philosophy, hardly any of the Fathers of the Church, ascribe to Plato this doctrine of an order of Ideas subsisting apart from the Divine Mind. They assert, almost unanimously, that Plato located his world of Ideas wholly in the Divine Intellect, and regarded the so-called *kosmos noëtos* as a system of Divine Conceptions.

(c) For ourselves, we will not venture to take sides in the controversy. It seems to us highly probable that Plato regarded the Divine Intellect as the source, and if we may so say, the *habitat* of Ideas. For he employs, to describe the oneness of the Ideas, the terms *nous*, *sophia*, *logos*, and this he regards not as a lifeless thing, but as a living and moving being. (Phileb. p. 30, Be Rep. VII., p. 517, Soph. p. 248). Moreover, he states expressly regarding the *nous* that it can exist only in a *soul*, *i.e.*, in a spiritual being. Again Plato distinctly asserts that God is the First Author, the *phutourgos* of all Ideas (De Rep. X., p. 597), and teaches that the *nous* and *alêtheia* are brought forth by that cause which is the cause of all things (Phileb. p. 30). These assertions seem to warrant the view that Plato did not attribute to Ideas independent subsistence apart from God, but rather regarded them as conceptions of the Divine Intellect. However, the authority of Aristotle in the matter cannot be lightly set aside, as is sometimes done; for he was the immediate disciple of Plato. It is not to be assumed that a man of Aristotle's wonderful acuteness of intellect failed to understand his master, and there does not seem to be any reason to believe that he wilfully misrepresented his teaching. It has indeed been asserted that Aristotle, not admitting Ideas into his own system, deliberately misrepresented

Plato's theory of Ideas in order the more easily to refute it. But this an accusation for which no positive proofs can be adduced. We therefore hold as more probable the opinion that Plato regarded Ideas as conceptions of the Divine Mind; but, for the reasons assigned, we refrain from stating this opinion as absolutely certain.

5. Plato's Theory of Knowledge is intimately connected with his doctrine of Ideas. Considering knowledge in its subjective aspect, we find that Plato distinguishes various kinds of knowledge according to the various objects. The prominent difference established in this connection is the difference between sensible and supersensible objects. Sensible objects are of two kinds — real bodies and the semblances of these bodies, such as are produced by art. Supersensible objects are also of two kinds; they are either mathematical entities or Ideas proper (*mathêmatika* and *ideai*).

6. Accordingly, we must first of all distinguish in human cognition between *doxa* and *noësis*.

The *doxa* is concerned with sensible objects; the *noêsis* with supersensible. Our sensuous perception must be described as *doxa*, because sensuous perception can do no more than enable us to form an opinion; it does not issue in complete certainty. Opinion is not indeed absolute uncertainty, but neither is it complete certainty; it is something intermediate between both, partaking of the character of each, just as the sensible order with which it has to do is intermediate between Being and Non-being, and has something of the nature of each. On the other hand, *noêsis*, which is concerned with the supersensible, attains to absolute certainty of cognition; the mind in this stage passes out of the vacillating state of mere opinion, and reaches the light of true *gnôsis*; *noêsis* is therefore the form of cognitive action which leads to scientific knowledge — *epistêmê*. There is, therefore, an essential difference between the two kinds of knowledge, the sensuous and the intellectual, a difference due as well to the essential difference between the objects of cognition as to the nature of the cognitive act itself.

7. We must make a further distinction still in the case both of *doxa* and *noêsis*. As has already been observed, *doxa* may be concerned either with bodies or with the semblances of bodies. In the first case it becomes *pistis*; in the latter it is *mereekasia*. To *pistis* a real something corresponds objectively; to *ekasia* only a picture of fancy — the one is Perception, the other Imagination. On the other hand, *noêsis* deals either with mathematical entities or with Ideas; in the former case it becomes *dianoia* (*ratio*); in the latter, *nous* (*intellectus*)...

9. These distinctions having been established with regard to human cognition viewed from its subjective side, Plato's Theory of Knowledge is further developed as follows

(a.) From our sensuous experience we cannot derive a knowledge of the supersensible. As long as our knowledge has to do with the phenomena manifested through the senses, so long are we like to men in a dream; like men inebriated or insane, we drift upon the current of mere phenomena, without light from any ray of higher knowledge. If we wish to rise to knowledge of true Being — of Ideas — we must withdraw from the sphere of mere sense; we must retire within ourselves, and there, with the pure, untroubled gaze of reason, contemplate the Ideal and the Divine. Sensible objects can help us to knowledge of the Ideal only in so far as the blurred reflection of the Ideas which manifest themselves in the world of sense move us to turn from these things and fix our gaze upon the objects of which they are the reflection. And this being so, sensible objects not being for us a means of reaching the Supersensible and the Ideal, the question at once arises, How is the chasm bridged over which separates us from the world of Ideas? In other words, How is contact of the human mind with Ideas — which, as such, are wholly transcendental entities — possible and conceivable?

(b.) To this question Plato cannot obtain from mere science an adequate answer. He is, therefore, obliged to recur to an hypothesis. This hypothesis he offers us in his doctrine of the antecedent existence of the soul. The soul, he teaches, has lived an extra-corporeal, purely spiritual life before its union with the body, and lived this life in the sphere of the ideal, not of the phenomenal world. In this state, Ideas were the immediate objects of its contemplation, and in this contemplation it found its happiness. But in consequence of its union with the body (how it came to be united to a body will be explained further on), it has forgotten the objects presented to its contemplation in that extra-corporeal existence. Yet it has not lost the faculty of recalling them to memory. It is stimulated to remembrance of them when it is confronted by the dim and confused pictures of Ideas presented by the objects of the sensible world. The picture awakes in it the remembrance of the prototype, and thus revives the knowledge of the Idea which had been forgotten. The acquisition of knowledge by man is thus no more than a process of memory — a recollection (*anamnêsis*).

Plato endeavours to support this hypothesis by certain scientific arguments. He adduces in its favour three principal proofs:

1. When we perceive objects in the world of sense, we form judgments regarding them, we judge them, *e.g.*, to be more or less like, or more or less good, or beautiful, and where there is question of human actions we judge them to be more or less just, holy, and so forth. But this clearly supposes that the notion of Likeness in itself, of Goodness, Beauty, Justice, Holiness, *in se*, existed antecedently in our minds; for we can judge of the more and less of Likeness, Goodness, Beauty, &c., in things only in so far as we compare them with Likeness, Goodness, Beauty, &c., *in themselves*, and determine whether they approach to or recede from the latter. Now man forms judgments of this kind at the moment that he first begins to use his reason; these notions must, therefore, have existed in his mind antecedently to all experience. It follows necessarily that the soul must have made acquaintance with the Ideas in question before its union with the body, that it has brought these notions with it into its present condition, and that the renewed knowledge of them in its present life is no more than mere remembrance. (Phaedo, p. 74.)

2. The same conclusion is suggested by the Heuristic Method of instruction. In this method the learner is led by a series of questions, arranged in logical sequence, to the knowledge of a given truth. In this process the truth is not given him from without; he is led to find it in himself. The questioning is merely an aid to a discovery which he makes in his own mind, it is merely a condition of the re-awakening of knowledge in the mind of the learner. This being so, it follows that the truths which the mind thus draws out of itself must have been present within it antecedently to all teaching and to all experience, that the mind must have acquired them before its present life began, that it must, consequently, have brought them with it into this terrestrial existence, and that the renewed knowledge of them is no more than a recollection of what, at some previous time, was the object of the mind's contemplation. (Phaedo, p. 73, Men. p. 82.)

10. Thus much with regard to Plato's doctrine of Ideas and Theory of Knowledge. We pass now to his Physics, in which are included his Theology, his Cosmogony, and his Psychology.

Physics of Plato. Theology, Cosmogony, and Psychology.

To begin with the Theological system of Plato; we find a threefold proof for the existence of Good:

(a) The older Philosophy of Nature took irrational Matter as the basis of all things, and held Reason, *i.e.*, the rational soul of man, to be evolved from it. Against this assumption Plato protests. We must begin, not with inert Matter, but with the Rational Soul. Matter is not the cause of its own motion; its motion supposes a moving cause different from itself. This moving cause cannot itself be of such kind that it also requires to be moved from without; such an hypothesis would involve us in an endless series. It must, therefore, be of that kind which is self-moving. This self-movement is the essential characteristic of the spiritual or psychical being, as contrasted with the material. Matter, according to this reasoning, necessarily postulates the existence of a "Soul." This Soul is the Divine Spirit, or Divine "Soul." Atheism, as a theory, is therefore absolutely irrational. (De Leg. X., p. 893; Phaedr. p. 245.)

(b) In the world Order and Design are everywhere manifest; they are observable in the lower regions of the universe, but more notably still in the regions of the stars. Order and Design, however, are not possible unless we suppose a Reason, and Reason (*nous*) can exist only in a soul (*psuchê*) or Personal Spirit. We are thus forced to admit a Personal Divine Spirit, which presides over the universe, and is the cause of the Order and Design which prevail in it. (Phaedr. p. 30.)

(c) The ultimate elements of things are the Unlimited and the Limit, for it is only by limitation of the Indefinite that a determinate definite object is possible. But the determination

of the Undefined by limitation supposes a determining cause, which, as such, is above the thing determined. This determining cause must be some supramundane divine principle. (Phileb. p. 23.)

2. We have next to inquire what are the attributes which Plato assigns to the Divine Being. We may sum up his teaching on the point as follows:

(a) The Divine nature is supremely perfect; it is endowed with every conceivable attribute; no perfection (*aretê*) is wanting to it. God is, therefore, the Absolute Good — by no other notion is his nature more perfectly represented than by the notion of the Good, for this notion combines in itself all the perfections with which the Divine Nature is endowed. For this reason God is the cause of all that is good, and of that only which is good; wickedness, evil, cannot be attributed to him as to its cause; He is the Author of good, and of good only. When the poets describe the gods as doing wicked deeds, they are dishonouring the Divine Nature. God is, furthermore, the Absolute Truth; it is impossible that He should deceive men, or lead them astray; the mythological stories of deceptions practised on men by the gods are absurd.

(b) God, being supremely perfect in his Nature, is immutable. If God could undergo any change, the cause of that change would be within His own Being, or without Him. The latter alternative is not admissible, for the nature which is supremely perfect cannot be changed by another. The former is also inconceivable, for if God could change Himself, He should change either to a more perfect or to a less perfect state: the former He cannot do, since He is already absolutely perfect; nor can He effect the latter, for no being, and least of all the most perfect, changes of its own accord from a more perfect to a less perfect condition. God is, therefore, unchangeable; He does not take one form at one time, another at another, as the poets tell us; He retains throughout eternity one simple, immutable form. (De Rep. II., p. 380.)

(c) God is a Personal Spirit, and, as such, is transcendently raised above the world. As Personal Spirit, He rules all things, and directs and guides all according to Reason and Providence. He is a supramundane being, and is therefore above the temporal order. Time affects only things of earth; God is above Time; He is the beginning, the middle, and the end of all things; the Absolute Present. (Tim. p. 37; De Leg. IV., p. 715.)

(d) In addition to the sovereign Divinity, Plato admits the existence of subordinate gods, to whom he assigns an intermediate rank between the Supreme God and the world, *i.e.*, man. He teaches that these subordinate divinities are ministers through whom God exercises His providence and His guiding influence upon earthly things, and that through them also the prayers and sacrifices of men are transmitted to God — for which reasons men owe them reverence. The highest rank among the subordinate gods is held by the star-gods — the souls of the stars; next come the demons, amongst whom the aether demons, *i.e.*, those whose bodies are formed of aether, hold the first place; below these are the Air and Water demons, with bodies formed of air or water. (Conviv., p. 202; De Leg. X., p. 895; Tim. p. 39.)

3. We pass now to Plato's theory of Cosmogony. He assumes three principles as necessary to explain the origin and present existence of the world: Matter, the underlying basis of the physical world (*causa materialis*); God, the Demiurgos, or efficient cause (*causa efficiens*); and Ideas, the models or prototypes of things (*causa exemplaris*). Assuming the existence of these ultimate causes, Plato, in *Timaeus*, explains the process of the formation of the world.

(a) Matter existed, and exists eternally, side by side with God. It was not produced by Him; it exists apart from Him, though side by side with Him. At first it was purely indeterminate, and therefore without any definite qualities. In this original condition it was without order — a wild, fluctuating mass, a chaotic thing, assuming, without rule or law, ever-changing forms. It was blind Necessity (*anagkê*), the antithesis of Mind acting by a plan (*nous*).

(b) But God was good, and free from jealousy; He resolved that Matter should not be

abandoned to this disorder. He fixed His gaze upon the eternal, unchangeable prototype (Ideas), and after this model fashioned Matter into a well-ordered world. Being Himself the Supreme Good, He made all things to be good, and to be like Himself. The formation of the world was accomplished in this order:

First God, as Demiurgos, created the Soul of the World. Combining two elements, one of which was indivisible and immutable, the other divisible and changeable, He formed a third or intermediary substance. In this way the World-Soul came into existence. The Soul thus formed was placed by God in the middle of the world, and extended in the form of a cross through the entire universe.

The Demiurgos next invested the World-Soul with a body of spherical form, this form being the most perfect. This body is composed of the four elements, each of which has a mathematical figure peculiar to itself. The elements of cubical form made the Earth, the pyramidal formed Fire, while midway between these, in the order of geometrical figures, came Water, composed of icosahedral elements, and Air composed of octahedral.

The Architect of the Universe has distributed the nobler, the unchangeable element of the World-Soul along the line of the Celestial Equator; the less noble, the changeable element, along the line of the Ecliptic. The inclination of the Ecliptic is a consequence of the less perfect nature of the spheres beneath the heaven of the fixed stars. The intervals that separate the celestial spheres are proportional to the lengths of a vibrating string which emit harmonizing tones. The Earth is placed in the middle of the universe; it forms a sphere through which passes the axis of the world.

From these fundamental premises Plato deduces the following conclusions regarding the world:

The world, as such, is not eternal. It had a beginning, at the moment when God began to impress order upon Matter. Time began with the beginning of the world; it is, however, the image of eternity. The world, once formed, cannot come to an end.

The world, as at present constituted, is the only possible world; any other is wholly inconceivable. The whole system of Ideas, forming the *kosmos noêtos* and serving as the model or prototype of the material world, reveals itself in the world actually existent. There is no Idea of the *kosmos noêtos* which has not its corresponding species existent in the world of phenomena. There is only one prototype, there is only one ectype.

The world, as it exists, is the most perfect world possible. A more perfect could not be. God, who is all goodness, and free from all jealousy, has made the world as like the ideal prototype as possible. He has made it to resemble Himself as closely as the nature of Matter permitted. Being the most perfect, and the most beautiful of all the things which have come into existence, the world must be endowed with life and reason, and this perfection is given it by the World-Soul; its motion is the most perfect, and the most constant — motion in a circle; it is in truth a second God.

Admitting that this world is the most perfect world possible, we are at once confronted with the question: How is it possible that evil can exist in the world, and what are the causes of this evil? In his answer to this question Plato has recourse to the nature of Matter. Good alone can come from God. But Matter is not only incapable of receiving to the full the action of the Divine, world-forming Goodness, it further withstands the formative and co-ordinating action of God upon it. In virtue of this resistance it becomes the principle of all disorder, wickedness, and evil in this world. It stands, to a certain extent, in opposition to God, and its activity in this opposition generates evil. The world, as the work of God, is perfect in good; but inasmuch as Matter withstands the action of God, evil must necessarily exist in the world. God cannot vanquish evil.

We pass now to Plato's Psychology. Plato discusses, in great detail, the problems of psychology, and endeavours, at all points, to find solutions in harmony with his theological and cosmological theories. He condemns emphatically the doctrine that the Soul is nothing more than a harmonious arrangement of the constituents of the body. For in such an hypothesis the strivings of the soul against the tendencies of Sense would be impossible; and furthermore, since every harmony admits of increase and diminution, one soul would be more a soul than another — an assertion which is clearly absurd. Again, harmony is incompatible with its antithesis — discord; if then the Soul were merely harmony, it could not admit into itself the discord of evil or of vice, it follows that we must hold the Soul to be a spiritual substance, simple in its nature, and distinct from the body. The further argument used by Plato to establish this doctrine is analogous to the proof adduced above to prove the existence of God. Psychical, or spiritual being, is of its nature prior to the material and corporeal, for the latter can receive its motion only from the former. This principle must apply to the relations between Soul and Body. The psychical element in man's nature cannot be a product of the corporeal; on the contrary, the psychical element must exist as a *causa movens* antecedently to the body, for without a Soul as *causa movens* a living body capable of movement would be impossible. The Body being a composite substance, belongs to the same order of being as the things of Sense, whereas the Soul is a simple substance, allied in nature to that unchanging, simple Being which exists above the world of phenomena. The Body we know through the senses, the Soul through reason.

What are the relations subsisting between Soul and Body? This question Plato answers as follows: The Soul stands to the Body in the relation of a *causa movens*, and in this relation only. The Soul dwells within the Body somewhat as the charioteer in the chariot; the Body is merely the organ which it uses to exert an external activity. The real man is the Soul only; in the concept "man," the notion "body" does not enter as a constituent element in the same way as the notion "Soul." Man is, properly speaking, a Soul, which uses a body as the instrument by which it exercises an activity on things without itself (*anima utens corpore*).

In accordance with this view of the relations between Soul and Body is the further opinion of Plato, that along with the rational Soul there also exists in man an irrational Soul, which is made up of two distinct parts; thus giving us, ultimately, three Souls in man.

The rational Soul, the *logos*, is the Soul proper of man. It is like to God, it may be called the Divine element in man; it has its seat in the head. To this Soul belongs all rational knowledge. Subordinate to this are two other Souls, dependent on the body, and subject to death (according to the *Timaeus*), the one is called by Plato the irascible (*thumos*), and this he locates within the breast; the other he calls the appetitive (*epithumia*), and locates in the abdomen. The functions of these two Souls are purely sensuous; on them the life of sense in man is dependent. The appetitive Soul is found in plants, the irascible Soul is possessed by brutes.

The method which Plato adopts to establish the existence of this threefold psychical element in man is interesting. We notice, in man, he says, a conflict of opposing tendencies; the appetite strives after something which the reason forbids, and anger rises up in opposition to reason. No being which is really one can come into contradiction with itself; to explain the internal conflict of these opposing tendencies which clash within us, we are forced to admit internal principles of action really different from one another. And as these conflicting movements are of three different kinds, we are obliged to admit a triple Soul in man — the appetitive, the irascible, and the rational. (De Rep. IV. p. 456).

In what relation do these three Souls stand to one another? Plato is of opinion that the rational Soul and the appetitive are, as it were, two extremes, between which the irascible Soul takes its place as a sort of middle term. Plato compares the *thumos* to a lion, the *epithumia* to a many-headed hydra, and also to a perforated or bottomless vessel. Of its nature the *thumos* is

on the side of reason, and supports the reason against the many-headed hydra which is always in rebellion against it.

Regarding the origin of the human Soul, Plato, in *Timaeus*, teaches that it is produced by God — in the same way as the World-Soul — by a mixture of those elements which he calls the “identical” and the “different.” This, however, applies only to the rational Soul. The irrational Soul is produced by the subordinate gods. It would be unworthy of the Supreme God to create a merely mortal thing, so He entrusted to the subordinate divinities the task of forming the mortal Soul, and uniting it to the immortal. In *Phaedrus*, p. 245, Plato seems to represent the Soul as not produced (*agenêtos*). We have already learned that the Soul is not united to the body in the first moment of its existence, that it has already existed in an incorporeal condition. We have now to inquire why it is united to a body with which it is not by nature destined to enter into union.

In *Phaedrus*, Plato furnishes an answer to this question under the form of an allegory. The Soul, before its imprisonment in the body, lived an incorporeal life among the gods. Mounted upon heavenly chariots the gods career through that ultra-celestial region whose beauty no poet has ever worthily sung; in the midst of the gods, the Soul equipped with heavenly wings, and guiding a chariot drawn by two steeds, held its course through the ultra-celestial sphere, enjoying the vision of truth. But one of the steeds was restive and ungovernable, and it happened that many souls could not control this steed. In consequence confusion was created in their ranks; in the tumult the wings of many were injured, and they fell ever lower and lower, till at last they fell to the earth to the region of material substance, *i.e.*, to the corporeal condition. The Soul that in its previous state had enjoyed most fully the vision of Being, became the Soul of a philosopher; the Soul that stood next in rank became the Soul of a king, and so on through a graduated series of human conditions down to the tyrants and sophists who hold the lowest places of all. In this first generation Souls do not enter into the bodies of brutes.

The meaning of this myth seems to be that the Soul in its incorporeal state had committed some offence for which it was punished by imprisonment in the body. Hence it is that Plato everywhere speaks of its union with the body not as an advantage, but as an evil. He calls the body the grave in which the Soul is shut in as a corpse; he calls it a prison, in which the Soul is confined like a captive; a heavy chain which binds the Soul, and hinders the free expansion of its energy and its activity. The culpability which has been punished by the imprisonment of the Soul within the body must have consisted, as indicated by the myth we have quoted, in the tendency towards the objects of sense; for we can hardly understand the restive steed to signify other than the *hepithumia* which we have seen to be that part of our nature which is in continual revolt against the law of reason.

The immortality of the (rational) Soul is emphatically asserted by Plato, and in *Phaedo* the theory is supported by several arguments. These arguments may be briefly stated thus:

(a) Everywhere opposites generate opposites. Death follows life, and out of death life is again generated. Man cannot form an exception to this universal law. As man, therefore, passes from life to death, so must he again awake from death to life. This would be impossible if the Soul, the principle of life, came to an end in death. It must, therefore, live on, that in its reunion with a body man may wake to life again.

(b) Being a simple substance, the Soul is kindred in nature to that which is absolutely simple and immutable (the Idea); in the same way as the body, being a composite substance, is kindred in nature to things sensible and changeable. As then the body, because of this affinity with that which is destructible, is itself destructible, so must the Soul, because of its affinity with the indestructible, be itself indestructible.

(c) If the Soul has existed by itself before its union with the body, it follows that it must exist

after separation from it. Now it is proved from the peculiar character of our cognitions that the Soul existed before its union with the body, it follows then that it will outlive its separation from the body.

(d) Furthermore, nothing can be at once itself, and the opposite of itself; it is impossible that the same object should have a share in two contradictory Ideas at the same time. Now the Soul is essentially life, for life is self-movement, and self-movement is the very essence of the Soul. But if the Soul participates in the Idea of “life,” and is a Soul only in so far as it participates in this Idea, it follows that it cannot admit into itself the opposite of life, *i.e.*, death. A dead Soul is a contradiction in terms. The Soul is, therefore, not merely immortal, its life is absolutely eternal, essentially excluding every possibility of dissolution.

(e) Again, the dissolution of any being whatever can be accomplished only by some evil antagonistic to the nature of that being. The one evil which is antagonistic to the nature of the Soul is vice, *i.e.*, moral evil. But this is clearly not capable of destroying the being of the Soul, consequently the Soul cannot be destroyed; it is therefore incorruptible, immortal (De Rep. X., p. 608). This argument gains additional force if we consider that the destruction of the Soul by moral evil would mean that the wicked have no punishment to expect — a consequence which is wholly at variance with the Moral Order. (Phaedo, p. 107.)

(f) Lastly, Plato, in *Timaeus*, appeals in proof of the Soul’s immortality to the goodness of God, who could not destroy a creature of beauty, even though it were a thing destructible by nature. In *Phaedo* he appeals to the conduct of the philosopher whose effort after knowledge is a constant effort after incorporeal existence, a striving to die.

Plato always connects the notion of immortality with the notion of retribution after death. The latter principle he holds as firmly as the immortality of the Soul. The good are rewarded after death, the wicked punished according to their deserts. In his exposition of this doctrine, Plato frequently introduces the ancient myths; for, according to him, nothing truer or better can be said on this theme than what is contained in these myths. The several myths which he introduces are not, however, always consistent with one another, and it would hardly be possible to explain away their differences. The fundamental notions which are put forth in these several myths may be stated as follows:

(a) The man whose life has been good and pleasing to God, and has been purified by philosophic effort, enters immediately after death into a condition of bliss; those who have cultivated the merely social virtues must pass through a previous process of purification; those who pass out of life answerable for some misdeeds, but only for such as can still be cured, have a temporary punishment to suffer; those whose misdeeds are incurable, are doomed to eternal reprobation. These who are not fully purified, retain after death something of corporeal being, which forms a shroud in which they hover restlessly over the graves of their bodies till their tutelary demons conduct them to the nether world.

(b) Souls, after death, do not remain permanently in the disembodied state, they enter into other bodies (metempsychosis), but into such as correspond to the moral condition in which they have quitted life. The good enter into the bodies of men; the less perfect into the bodies of women the wicked into the bodies of beasts; the species of brute body into which each soul enters is determined by the species of vice or passion to which it was addicted in life.

(c) All these processes are accomplished within a period of ten thousand years. When this term has been completed, all souls return to the condition out of which they passed in their first process of generation, and a new cosmical period begins. Plato sometimes speaks of an earlier period, which may be described as a golden age. There was then no evil, and no death; the earth spontaneously brought forth food in abundance; man and beast lived together in friendly concord; there was no distinction of sexes; men were produced from the earth by spontaneous

generation. All this came to an end at the beginning of the next great period — a period which was introduced by a great cosmical revolution. It was then that the world, as we know it now, first came into existence (Polit. p. 296.) It was then that the distinction of the sexes was first established, and that the human species was reproduced by carnal generation. We have here distorted traditions of a happier and more highly privileged condition of existence enjoyed by the first men.

Plato's Ethics and Political Philosophy.

We begin our account of Plato's ethical system with his inquiries into the nature of pleasure, and into its bearing upon man's moral life. In this connection Plato endeavours to establish a mean between the Hedonism of the Cyrenaic school and the doctrines of the Cynics. He distinguishes between true and false pleasures. The first are those which arise from virtue, and, in a special manner, from the knowledge of truth. False pleasures, on the other hand, are those which have not their source in virtue, and are, moreover, antagonistic to virtue, and destructive of it. True enjoyment, real pleasure, is pure, and does not affect the purity of the Soul; false pleasure is impure, and defiles the Soul.

It follows from this that all pleasures are not evil, nor to be avoided as evil. The Cynics are not justified in their absolute condemnation of pleasure. But neither is it true that every pleasure is good, and a thing to be striven for. Hedonism with its unqualified exaltation of pleasure is as one-sided as Cynicism. The truth lies between the two theories. To secure the pure and real pleasure which springs from virtue must be the object of human endeavour; such pleasure is the true good for man; but he must fly the impure and false pleasures which the senses supply, and which are at variance with virtue; they are an evil for him.

The relations which Plato further establishes between pleasure and virtue are analogous to those which he establishes between Matter and Ideas. Matter, by participating in the ideal order, takes form and orderly arrangement; analogously, pleasure receives from virtue its true significance and its rightful limitation. Pleasure is further like matter in this that it exists in a condition of continual change, that it is unstable and transient, and by virtue only is made to share in the good — *i.e.*, in the enduring. Not pleasure by itself, nor virtue by itself, is the true good of men, but only the combination of both — the union of virtue as the formal, determining element, with pleasure as the material and determined.

So much being premised, we are now in a position to deal with the further question — What, according to Plato, is the Supreme Good for man? To understand rightly Plato's teaching on this point, we must distinguish between the Supreme Good in the objective sense of the term and the Supreme Good in the subjective sense. This distinction being drawn, we find that Plato teaches: —

(a.) Man's Supreme Good, in the objective order, is the "Idea of the Good;" and as this is one with God, it follows that man must find his Supreme Good in God. Goods are either goods of the soul, or goods of the body, or external goods of fortune; the goods of the soul surpass all the others, but amongst these the Idea of the Good — God, holds the highest place. Man must, therefore, endeavour to rise to God, and find his Chief Good in Him.

(b.) Subjectively considered, the Chief Good of man is Happiness. The basis of Happiness is the assimilation of man with God. (De Rep. X., p. 613; Theaet. p. 176.) The assimilation with God is effected by knowledge and by enthusiastic love of God as the Supreme Good. In the knowledge and love of God as the Supreme Good consists, then, the supreme happiness of man.

5. The means by which man must reach his highest happiness in God is virtue. Plato's description of virtue resembles that of the Pythagoreans: virtue is Harmony, vice is Discord;

man is virtuous if his inner nature is rightly ordered, if the parts of his Soul hold their natural relations to one another; man is wicked if this interior order is wanting, if the parts of his Soul are unnaturally at variance with one another. Virtue is, therefore, the health of the Soul; vice is its disease; in virtue consists its beauty and its strength; vice makes its weakness and deformity. Virtue must be loved for its own sake, not for sake of external goods.

Virtue, being the inner harmony of the Soul, is essentially one; it admits, however, of a division into four cardinal virtues, a division which is based on the distinction between the three parts of the Soul. The four cardinal virtues are Wisdom, Fortitude, Temperance, and Justice. Wisdom (*sophia*) belongs to the rational Soul, and consists in true knowledge. Fortitude or courage (*andreia*) is a virtue of the *thumos* and is exercised in resolute striving after the Good, without any regard for the attendant difficulties. Temperance (*sôphrosunê*) belongs to the appetitive Soul (*epithumia*), and manifests itself in the control of the desires and their restraint within proper limits. Justice (*dikaiosunê*) belongs at once to all three parts of the Soul, and consists in this, that each part of the Soul, occupying the position assigned it by nature, discharges its proper functions, without passing beyond its own sphere. Justice is thus the bond and union of the other virtues, the principle of order within the Soul. Justice, as applied to the relations of man and the gods, is called Piety (*hosiotês*).

The principal among the four cardinal virtues is Wisdom. The other virtues can be acquired by practice and habitual exercise; but if they are not associated with Wisdom, they are mere shadows of true virtue, and they must degenerate — Temperance into stupidity, and Fortitude into brutish impulse. Plato goes so far in his commendation of the virtue of Wisdom as to assert that the man who possesses this virtue possesses all the other virtues, and has no further need to acquire them by practice. He is thus led at last to the Socratic theory that the man who possesses true knowledge cannot do wrong. No one does wrong knowingly; the evil-doer acts in ignorance; ignorance is the real evil, and the source of all evil. We can now understand why and to what extent Plato holds that virtue can be imparted by instruction.

From these doctrines the conclusion follows that the effort to gain Wisdom (Philosophy) is the highest ethical duty of human life. This effort after Wisdom, sustained by the love of the good and the beautiful, has two aspects, a theoretical and a practical.

(a.) In its practical aspect it consists in the emancipation of the rational Soul from the body; for the body is only a hindrance to the Soul in its effort to attain true knowledge. The philosopher must give his first attention to the Soul; he must give thought to the body only in so far as extreme necessity requires. The life of the philosopher must be a continual effort to rid himself of the body, a constant preparation for death; nay, it should be, in a certain sense, a continual death.

(b.) In its theoretical aspect this striving after Wisdom consists in the constant endeavour of man to extend and to perfect his knowledge of truth. He must ever increase in the knowledge of things divine, until he at length attains to that contemplation of the divinity of which the Soul is deprived at its first entrance into the body. In this way man reaches assimilation with God, the Supreme Good, and becomes possessed of the bliss which it confers. In the present life he can never reach this goal; his perfection is to be attained in the life to follow.

9. The man who by virtue, and chiefly by the virtue of Wisdom, makes himself like to God, becomes thereby the friend of the gods. The gods love the virtuous man, and bestow favours upon him; the evils that overtake him are no more than punishments of previous faults. Virtue brings man into relation with the Divinity; and man is, therefore, not virtuous if he does not honour the gods. Irreligion is not only the most egregious folly, it is also the grossest immorality. Moreover, the attainment of virtue is a task of much difficulty; the aid of the gods is absolutely necessary in accomplishing it; virtue may, in fact, be regarded as a gift of the gods.

We pass now to the political philosophy of Plato. Here we notice that Plato emphatically rejects the notion of the Sophists that all right and all law are derived from the State, and exist only within it. He holds that there exist a natural right and a natural law, which have their validity without the concurrence of the State, and independently of the State. Nevertheless, he follows his leaning towards the absolutism, of civil authority so far, that in his theory the rights of individuals are practically effaced by the rights of the State. In his opinion, the State, as the totality, has absolute power over individuals. The well-being of the whole is first in importance; the prosperity of individuals is admissible only as far as it comports with the well-being of the whole. Individuals are, therefore, bound to render to the State entire submission and unconditional obedience; private interests must be sacrificed to the public good, and nothing can be permitted which does not serve the common interests. In this portion of his system Plato has not succeeded in rising above that absolutism of civil authority which was recognised in practice by almost all ancient States.^[1]

Beginning with these principles, Plato, in his work “De Republica,” constructs his ideal State — *i.e.*, he sketches a State which would correspond perfectly to the Idea of the State. In this sketch we find he borrows many details from the Hellenic polities, in particular from the Doric system of legislation. After sketching the “perfect State” in the *Republic*, he proceeds, in the *Laws*, to describe the “second-best;” for he is aware that, in view of the actual circumstances of society, the “perfect” State can be realised only with great difficulty, if at all.

In his sketch of the Ideal State, we observe that Plato looks on the State as but the human individual magnified, and that he models his sketch on the nature of man. As the inner nature of man, the Soul, has three parts, so the State consists of three orders: the order of husbandmen, artisans, and traders (productive class), corresponding to the appetitive soul (*epithumia*); the order of guardians or warriors (defensive class), corresponding to the *thumos*; and the order of rulers, corresponding to the rational soul, *logos*. And as the perfection of the individual depends on virtue, the divisions of which correspond to the several parts of the Soul, so the perfection of the State consists in this, that the producing class is guided by temperance, the defensive class by valour, the ruling class by wisdom, and that, finally, the entire body politic should be controlled by justice — *i.e.*, that each order, according to its rank in the State, should faithfully and fully discharge its own functions, without passing out of its own sphere. In order that the State may reach this perfection, it must engage its citizens to the practice of the virtues becoming their position. This is the primary duty which self-interest imposes upon it.

Plato bestows little attention on the productive order, which he places lowest in the State; he assigns to its members little more than the duties of slaves. But he occupies himself at length with the defensive order, for from this order the rulers come. In this portion of his system he is an advocate of the principle of absolutism in government, and of absolutism of the socialistic type. He insists on a community of goods in the order of guardians; no individual shall possess property. All shall eat and lodge together. Money shall not be allowed. In the order of guardians Plato also requires community of wives; there shall be no marriage, no family. The rulers shall assign certain women to certain men; these shall cohabit for a period to be determined by law; the children generated must not know their parents; they shall be taken from them immediately after birth, and shall be brought up in common in a separate place, under the care of the State. Cohabitation may be allowed beyond the period fixed by the law, but any fruit of this intercourse must be destroyed in embryo.

The public education of children shall be continued till their twentieth year. In the first stage of this education, the development of the body must be the chief object of the educator; then follows the learning of myths; and then, in succession, gymnastics, reading and writing, poetry, music, mathematics, and finally military exercises. At this point a division of the pupils must be

made: those who are less apt for knowledge, but adapted for deeds of valour, remain warriors; the others study the sciences till their thirtieth year. Then comes a second division. The less capable are devoted forthwith to the less important public offices; the more distinguished pursue the study of Dialectic from their thirtieth to their thirty-fifth year, and are then appointed to posts of command till their fiftieth. After this they finally reach the perfection of philosophy — the contemplation of the Idea of the Good; they become philosophers in the true sense of the word, and as such are admitted into the number of the rulers, and undertake the highest offices of State functions. The course of education is the same for boys and girls alike. It has been seen that poetry forms part of this system of education, but this must be understood of that species of poetry which is an imitation of the Good — *i.e.*, of religious hymns; the art which imitates only the world of phenomena in which good and evil are mingled together must be excluded, for it serves only to excite the passions. Poets who cultivate this species of art are to be banished from the State. This kind of imitative poetry is not real art, for the Good alone is really beautiful.

We see that Plato's Ideal State can be realised only when philosophers become rulers of the State or the rulers are guided by a sound philosophy. This requirement Plato abandons in the "second-best" State. Here the theory of Ideas is not introduced as the basis of the scheme for the rulers' education; stress is chiefly laid on training in mathematics; the mode of divine worship is more nearly in accord with the notions prevalent in Hellas; private property and marriage remain untouched.

Albert Stöckl. *Handbook of the History of Philosophy. (Part 1: Pre-Scholastic Philosophy)*. Trans. T.A. Finlay. Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, 1887.

© SophiaOmni, 2011. The specific electronic form of this text is copyright. Permission is granted to print out copies for educational purposes and for personal use only. No permission is granted for commercial use.