

Plato: Memory of the Gods

J.D. Casten – 1994

www.jd.casten.info

“Time brings everything; and dragging years alter names and forms, nature and even destiny.”

(“On Time,” an epigram attributed to Plato)

Plato has sometimes been heralded as the founder of western philosophy, which, although partly true considering the breadth of his writings, the Academy he helped establish, and his ever growing heritage, is also ironic, bearing in mind that other older philosophers take center stage in many of his dialogues. These dialogues—a format which makes him more of a playwright than a poet (but then again, was Shakespeare not, foremost, a poet?)—These give Plato the aspect of an objective reporter, adding to the lucid sobriety of investigations into what are often obscure mysteries. This outside perspective also allows Plato to forsake some responsibility (as well as credit) for the views put forth; it leaves the possibility of Plato having a critical stance concerning his own writings. This absence from his own text, a sort of negativity, parallels the critical movement of the dialogues themselves, as the main orator, usually Socrates, frequently slips around arguments, putting most assertions in question.

Despite Plato's absence, and the plurality of orators with their seemingly wandering critiques (which dialogues, more often than not, turn out to be meticulously crafted and interlocked with related metaphorical themes), I will argue that a consistent metaphysical and epistemological structure of reality and our relation to it remains throughout his major writings.

That is, arguing against some contemporary interpretations suggesting that he changed his views, I will elucidate the coherent conceptual framework which operates as a backdrop, and often as a linchpin, throughout the entirety of Plato's works— a sympathetic reconstruction of Plato's outline of reality, as it were, which, while not examining the arguments put forth in much depth, may be a critique in that it will bring weaknesses and “implied inconsistencies” within the consistent structure to the fore.

THE STRUCTURE OF PLATO'S COSMOLOGY

In various episodes throughout his dialogues— as with Socrates' account of the underworld in the *Phaedo*, in the “Myth of Er” in *The Republic*, in the story of time reversal in *The Statesman*, and in the account of the universe's creation in *The Timaeus*—we get a view of the hierarchical structure of the universe. The *Timaeus* (29e-48e) spells this out in detail, as it describes how a single God created order out of chaos, and gave intelligence to soul (a she); and put within her a bodily “world” “animal” (a he) made from the four elements (fire, air, water, and earth) and such was a rotating globe and also a heaven—all of which was the whole encompassing all parts. Soul was created by mixing being, sameness, and difference from both the bodily and the eternal; and it was centered in the body and diffused to the exterior outside it. This notion of a bodily universal infused with a universal soul (see also *Philebus*, 30a), goes beyond the notion of an earthly Gaia, in that it included reference to the inner sphere of the moving planets, and the outer sphere of rotating stars (the earth then thought to be at rest)—the soul also had revolving inner and outer spheres corresponding to the universal bodily ones (which hints at astrology). Subsequently in creation, the single God created time (to be discussed later), and made the host of Greek gods, who were instructed to create the humans whose individual

souls (evidently made from soul stuff) were assigned to stars and put in bodies.

In the “Myth of Er,” recounted in book x of *The Republic* (614b-621b), we find further details of the beyond, as Er, revived from the dead, told of his soul visiting various places: an earthly meadow where souls are judged, and go through divine portals leading up or down; an elevated height whence they could see the inner and outer spheres (similar to those described in *The Timaeus*, yet from another perspective); and a “transcendent” land where souls draw lots for their future lives and forget previous ones before being reborn.

A different account of the journey after death is described by Socrates in the *Phaedo* (107d-115b). There he makes a remarkably accurate description of the earth as seen from space—he notes that the atmosphere ends like the surface of water, and that:

“the real earth, viewed from above, is supposed to look like one of these balls made of twelve pieces of skin.”
(*Phaedo*, 110b)

He describes the underworld where the dead are judged, and claims those who:

“have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy live thereafter without bodies, and reach habitations even more beautiful.”
(*Phaedo*, 114c)

In the reversal of time story in *The Statesman* (269b-274e), Plato's Eliatic stranger tells of when after:

“each soul had run through its appointed number of births.... the pilot of the ship of the universe... let go

the handle of its rudder... [and] destiny and its own inborn urge took control of the world again and reversed the revolution in it.”

(*The Statesman*, 272d-e)

After an initial shock, the universe went well for awhile, but began to become disordered, until the creator God noticing:

“its troubles, and anxious for it lest it sink racked by storms and confusion, and be dissolved again in the bottomless abyss of unlikeness,... [took] control of the helm once more.”

(*The Statesman*, 273d)

This story is important to Plato's cosmology, in that it discusses both God's abandonment of and intervention with our universe, and the consequent disruption of our past, which is now in a process of healing.

THE IMMORTAL SOUL

In the *Phaedrus* (246a-248b), the soul is described as a charioteer struggling with two opposing desires—for and against order; while in *The Republic* (book IV, 437b-441a), there are three parts of the soul—“desire,” “high spirit” (anger), and “reason.” The discrepancy between these two accounts could be resolved if one sees a harmony of the three parts as following orderly desire, while a disharmony of the three parts would be following disorderly desire. At any rate, both accounts depict a soul attempting to desire the orderly in harmony with reason.

Now, at a more metaphysical level, various discussions claim the soul to be the source of all:

“changes and transformations”
(*Laws* X, 892a)

“all actions have soul in them... [and] all things that have part in soul change, for the cause of change lies within themselves, and as they change they move in accord with the ordinance and law of destiny”
(*Laws* X, 905a,c)

Also:

“All soul is immortal, for that which is ever in motion is immortal. But that which while imparting motion is itself moved by something else can cease to be in motion, and therefore cease to live.... [The soul as] self-mover is the source and first principle of motion for all other things that are moved.... [and] a first principle can not come into being.”
(*Phaedrus*, 246c-d)

However, since the *Timaeus* discusses the creation of soul, one must take into account that the soul was created, be it before the creation of time (which seems to contradict its un-created immortality). Yet, having been created before the distinction of the eternal and temporal, soul never comes into being when it is created—it already exists in motion before time begins; or, possibly its “beginning” coincides with the beginning of time, the motion of soul and time itself being intimately interconnected.

THE ETERNAL, NATURAL FORMS

The distinction between the eternal and temporal marks the most fundamental structural (dialectical) division in Plato's philosophy. In the *Philebus* (53e-b), it is suggested that

becoming is for being in the same way that shipbuilding is for ships. Yet, our temporal world itself was modeled after the eternal (*Timaeus*, 37c), implying that the eternal was needed for the temporal. Both accounts coincide, though, when we see that becoming strives to be that which it is modeled after—its origin is its goal. This division, between an original eternal reality, and a subsequent temporal world of shadow play, and our own striving to exit the latter to the former, forms the crux of Plato's philosophical doctrine, and will underlie the entirety of the following discussion.

The order of the eternal, for Plato, includes the original paragon for every modeled aspect of our universe. These forms are variously discussed throughout the dialogues as being ideas, essences, kinds, natures, characters, or real existences. Hence various objects are modeled after and fall short of their forms just as a painting may be modeled after and fall short of its subject. Thus, when one breaks a weaving shuttle, one does not make a new one with reference to the broken one, but to:

"the true or ideal shuttle."
(*Cratylus*, 389b)

It may seem strange that something like a weaving shuttle would have an eternal form, when one might consider such an artifact arbitrary on a universal scale. However, Plato sees such items arising as naturally as plants—that is, given our situation, and our progress towards eternal reality, certain things were bound to arise. Moreover, not only do our objects have forms, but also our actions:

“actions are as real as well as the things.... actions also are done according to their proper nature.... In cutting for example, we do not cut as we please, and with any chance instrument, but we cut with the proper

instrument only, and according to the natural process of cutting”
 (*Cratylus*, 425)

There are forms of skills too; and entire arts also serve as “super”-forms where:

“forms of skill converge”
 (*Sophist*, 232a)

And one must:

“consider... [an art] in all its forms”
 (*Statesman*, 281b).

For the arts are far from artificial (see *Laws X*, 889a), and Plato maintains one should:

“defend the claim of law itself and art to be natural, or no less real than nature.”
 (*Laws X*, 890d)

These eternal forms can be difficult for us to discern in our temporal world—for, if we consider time as a fourth dimension, then trying to understand the eternal from a temporal standpoint would be like trying to imagine a living three or four dimensional Socrates when only given a two dimensional picture. This difficulty can be illustrated further by noting that any comprehensive definition we may state for a form could not predict the possible future changes in that definition (e.g., consider how the invention of the automobile changes one's conception of what a “vehicle” can be). The eternal forms, in their infinite simplicity or complexity, surpass any temporal understanding we could have of them.

Although each form can be isolated as a precise singularity,

forms also come in groups, as there is discussion of a “family” of kinds (*Philebus*, 25d); and as the forms can have a “pedigree” (*Sophist*, 226a), and a “lineage” (*Sophist*, 268d) (Such familial relations among the forms will become more evident in the subsequent discussion on the dialectic; relations such as between the form of a knife, and the form of cutting should be readily seen though.)

The perfection of forms and their degraded temporal manifestation can easily be discerned with geometrical forms. For example, we might imagine a perfect circle, yet we will never see one in our world. We come to know of circles in our temporal experience, yet we judge the perfection of these worldly circles by a transcendent standard. Hence we can see why it is suggested that:

“forms are as it were patterns fixed in the nature of things.”
(Parmenides, 132d)

The perfect forms may be as easy to see in the world as far as one can see a perfect circle in a worldly one, and these forms are transcendent only to the extent that we have as yet to manifest them—a bit of the eternal may be found in every worldly art, action, and object. Indeed, it is claimed that forms actually work through us:

“carpentering does the works of a carpenter.”
(*Cratylus*, 416d)

Plato is careful to note that the relation between forms and our names for them may be problematic. In the *Cratylus*, numerous etymologies are traced to show how names (of people, gods, and things like wisdom, the sun, and the soul) originally described their objects; e.g. “sun” may mean—that which “gathers” (attention), “rolls” (through the sky), and:

“variegates the productions of the earth.”
(*Cratylus*, 408e-409a)

It is suggested that language originated with hand gestures, audible syllables, and written letters which imitated the objects and actions named (as with pictographs and onomatopoeias—consider the word “crow” for example, its root, “crawe,” and the sound of cawing). Hence language, with its original names, consisting of copies of originals, falls short of its object, just as our objects fall short of the forms they are modeled after. And with words changing forms and uses with cultural convention, the problem worsens. This aspect of language going on holiday can be found in the *Euthydemus* as well, where a couple of sophists use the quirks and ambiguity of language to confute people without regard to truth—linguistic ploys may be used with language itself without regard to its connection with reality. Such a notion, that language (like all artistic imitation) is far removed from worldly objects and affairs, prompts Socrates, at the end of the *Cratylus* to suggest that we look beyond the original defining names, and investigate the full complexity of the things themselves. (Interestingly, the arguments put forth in the *Ion* and the latter parts of *The Republic*, concerning the corruptness of imitative arts, imply that language might be banned as well—Plato forgot to ban his own art.)

Our discussion heretofore has drawn a distinction between the eternal forms, and their temporal copies. Yet, in the *Timaeus* (48e-52e), a new kind of “being” is introduced on the other side of the copy across from form: *matter*. The three types are variously described as such (note the relation between the words “paternal” and “pattern,” and “maternal” and “matter”):

Pattern	—Generation	—Matter
Father	—Child	—Mother
Form	—Model	—Formless
Being	—Intermediate	—Space

This formless matter seems in accord with what is called the “infinite” or “unlimited” by Anaximander (this can be contrasted with Parmenides’ claim that reality is limited by being). At any rate, one can see that the temporal multiplication of forms in matter produces defective models; un-structured matter causes a loss of formal structure as real unity is dissipated in dreamy multiplicity.

It should be noted though, that the bridge between form and matter is illustrated with reference to the four elements. Since one element can become another (heated Water becomes Air), it is suggested that there is a common substratum for both forms: matter (*Timaeus*, 49c-d). Indeed, the four elements do have geometric forms or shapes (*Timaeus*, 54b-56c) and are “substantiated” (generated) in matter. This argument is actually stronger than a mere critique of the four elements would suggest—for what are our contemporary elements (hydrogen, oxygen, etc.) if not consistent geometric configurations (forms) of matter? (Moreover, our sub-atomic particles and energies may be few in kind as well.) The question this leaves is, if so much can be explained with reference only to the elemental forms (as is done in the latter part of the *Timaeus*) what need do we have for any other types of form? An answer to this would most likely include a reference to complex family ties between elements and “ordinary” objects and actions, and/or a purposive or intended relation between the former and latter. Reference is made to this problem, concerning the scope of causal action (and its relation to the soul as self-mover), in the *Phaedo*:

“to say that it is because of them [the causality of the

elements] that I do what I am doing, and not through choice of what is best—although my actions are controlled by mind—would be a very lax and inaccurate form of expression. Fancy being unable to distinguish between the cause of a thing and the condition without which it could not be a cause! It is the latter, as it seems to me, that most people call a cause—attaching to it a name to which it has no right. That is why one person surrounds the earth with a vortex, and so keeps things in place by means of the heavens, and another props it up on a pedestal of air, as though it were a wide platter” (*Phaedo*, 99a-b).

This problem, concerning the action of causality, is also mentioned in the *Sophist*, where causality is noted as being that which marks things as physically real, but since such actions are in becoming, they are not considered ultimately real (*Sophist*, 248c). Ironically, a thorough examination of the way causal element forms may participate with the other forms may reveal that these more complex forms are actually types of content.

MEDIATING SPIRITS

The triad structure of 1) eternal being, 2) the unlimited void of matter, and 3) the fluctuating generation in-between, occurs also in a discussion in the *Symposium*. There Socrates tells of:

“a Mantinean woman called Diotima... who taught... [him] the philosophy of Love.”
(*Symposium*, 201d-e)

She points out that there can be a middle ground between either/or oppositions (e.g. something may be neither good nor bad), and discusses a type of agent intermediate between the divine and mundane, the spirits:

“They are the envoys and interpreters that ply between heaven and earth, flying upward with our worship and our prayers, and descending with the heavenly answers and commandments, and since they are between the two estates they weld both sides together and merge them into one great whole. They form the medium of the prophetic arts, of the priestly rites of sacrifice, initiation, and incantation, of divination and of sorcery, for the divine will not mingle directly with the human, and it is only through the mediation of the spirit world that man can have intercourse, whether waking or sleeping, with the gods. And the man who is versed in such matters is said to have spiritual powers, as opposed to the mechanical powers of the man who is expert in the more mundane arts. There are many spirits, and many kinds of spirits to, and Love is one of them.”

(Symposium, 202e-203a)

“Love” itself is said to be the son of “Need” and “Resource” (“Resource” being a son of “Craft”). This triad, Resource, Love, and Need, parallels the triad of form, model, and matter, where Love operates between lack and supply. And in Diotima's example, the lack in question is the wisdom of the eternal, and so:

“Love is a lover of wisdom, and, being such, he is placed between wisdom and ignorance—for which his parentage also is responsible, in that his father is full of wisdom and resource, while his mother is devoid of either.”

(Symposium, 204b)

In line with generation being placed between form and matter, Diotima also compares Love's striving for the eternal

with humans' drive for procreation and desire for lasting fame:
Procreation is:

“how the body and all else that is eternal partakes of the eternal”

(*Symposium*, 208b)

And:

“men's great incentive... is to “To win eternal mention in the deathless roll of fame.”

(*Symposium*, 208c)

Such a conception is comparable to more modern concepts, such as the desire for reproduction, or repetition compulsion; yet it differs in that Love strives for the super-temporal—not a striving for a repetition in time, but a striving to actually traverse all time.

With this concept of spirit, we can see Plato's hierarchical scheme correlates to the evolution of conceptual thinking—spirits, being anthropomorphized concepts, bridge a gap between the complex personalities of the gods, and the delineation of abstract concepts. However, the relationship between spirits and forms is not explicitly spelled out. What would the relationship be between the form of love and the spirit of love? Spirits do fall short of the eternal forms though, so one could surmise that spirits are the purest temporal manifestation of their forms. Such a hierarchy is re-enforced by Diotima's claim that:

“we are only at the bottom of the true scale of perfection.”

(*Symposium*, 210a)

REVELATION AND RECOLLECTION

With Diotima's account of the spirits, we are moving away from an account of the eternal order of things towards our relation to and experience of eternity. She suggests that our striving for eternal wisdom culminates in a:

“final revelation”
(*Symposium*, 210a)

which one reaches after successive levels of “initiation;” one falls in love with one body, then with all bodies; then with the soul, the laws, institutions, and sciences; and finally with the

“one form of knowledge.”
(*Symposium*, 210a-d)

Diotima describes how:

“Whoever has been initiated so far in the mysteries of Love and has viewed all these aspects of the beautiful in due succession, is at last drawing near the final revelation. And now, Socrates, there bursts upon him that wondrous vision which is the very soul of the beauty he has toiled so long for. It is an everlasting loveliness which neither comes nor goes, which neither flowers nor fades, for such beauty is the same on every hand, the same then as now, here as there, this way as that way, the same to every worshiper as it is to every other. Nor will his vision of the beautiful take the form of a face, or of hands, or of anything that is of the flesh. It will be neither words, nor knowledge, nor a something that exists in something else, such as a living creature, or the earth, or the heavens, or anything that is—but subsisting of itself and by itself in an eternal oneness, while every lovely thing partakes of it in such

sort that, however much the parts may wax and wane, it will be neither more nor less, but still the same inviolable whole.”

(*Symposium*, 210e-211b).

No doubt, this step by step progress towards the one is akin (yet subtly different) to the progress portrayed in the “Allegory of the Cave” in Book VII of *The Republic* (ironically, this account of finding reality was Socrates’ “dream” [*Republic*, 517b]) In the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates claims:

“I am a seer.”
(*Phaedrus*, 242c)

The madness of prophecy is discussed, and again, reference is made to the “final revelation.” I quote Plato at length here in respect to a poetic experience which can barely be summarized (Socrates notes that he is often on the verge of poetry in the *Phaedrus*):

“[O]nly the soul that has beheld truth may enter into this our human form—seeing that man needs understand the language of forms, passing from a plurality of perceptions to a unity gathered together by reasoning—and such understanding is a recollection of those things which our souls beheld aforesaid... Therefore is it meet and right that the soul of the philosopher alone should recover her wings, for she... is ever near in memory to those things a god's nearness whereunto makes him truly a god. Wherefore if a man makes right use of such means of remembrance, and ever approaches to the full vision of the perfect mysteries, he and he alone becomes truly perfect... [A]nd when he that loves beauty is touched by... [divine] madness he is called a lover. Such a one, as soon as he beholds the beauty of this world, is

reminded of true beauty, and his wings begin to grow... Now... every human soul has, by reason of her nature, had contemplation of true being... Some, when they had the vision, had it but for a moment... Few indeed are left that can still remember much... Beauty it was ours to see in all its brightness in those days when, amidst that happy company, we beheld with our eyes that blessed vision... whole and unblemished were we... blissful were the spectacles on which we gazed in the moment of final revelation; pure was the light that shone around us, and pure were we, without taint of that prison house which now we are encompassed withal, and call a body... [And] when one who is fresh from the mystery, and saw much of the vision, beholds a godlike face or bodily form that truly expresses beauty, first there come upon him a shuddering and a measure of that awe which the vision inspired.... [and] with the passing of the shudder... by reason of the stream of beauty entering in through his eyes there comes a warmth, whereby his soul's plumage is fostered... the stump of the wing swells and hastens to grow from the root over the whole substance of the soul, for aforesaid the whole soul was furnished with wings.”
 (*Symposium*, 249b-251c).

This “final revelation,” which is humanly experienced via “recollection,” is in accord with the discussion of learning in the *Meno*. There, Socrates argues that the immortal soul has been born so many times as to have seen everything, and hence:

“seeking and learning are in fact nothing but recollection.”
 (*Meno*, 81c-d)

The poetical aspect of this account of revelation is also in accord with recollection, in that the mother of the muses who inspires poets is “Mnemosyne,” or “Memory”—whose name implies she is a spirit; in which case it would be the spirits of Love and Memory which figure in our approach to the divine revelation of the one.

The mention, in the extended quote above, of one's being reminded of the vision of beauty by a beautiful bodily form, is also consistent with the discussion of recollection in the *Phaedo*, where it is noted that we can be:

“reminded by similarity.”
(*Phaedo*, 74a)

In that discussion it is also claimed that:

“equal objects of sense are desirous of being like it [absolute equality], but are only imperfect copies.”
(*Phaedo*, 75b)

That is, one worldly object is never exactly the same as another, yet each strives for the perfect single identity of the form. Although the notion of objects desiring is mysterious (is it we or the objects themselves that desire they would be perfect?), such helps to explain how our memory of the eternal can be prompted in the temporal world.

THE MAIEUTIC METHOD

Plato has Socrates note that his own method of instruction is not one of imparting knowledge, but of helping others to gain their own. In the *Theaetetus* (149a-151d), Socrates compares himself to a midwife, where the mind may be:

“in some labor with some thought it has conceived.”
(*Theaetetus*, 151b)

Socrates had also noted that:

“Diotima’s own method of inquiry [was] by question and answer”
(*Symposium*, 201e)

And other philosophers are noted as using the method as well, e.g. the Eleatic stranger:

“asking questions, as Parmenides himself did.”
(*Sophist*, 217c)

Although never explicitly stated, such a method, where the instructor (theoretically) does not hand over knowledge, but assists the student in discovering things for themselves, is congruous with learning being a form of recollection. In this way, we can see the Socratic, or maieutic, method as being a means to agitating and prompting a recollection of the eternal.

Such does not necessitate our participation in an exterior dialogue for the gaining of knowledge, as it is noted that:

“thinking and discourse are the same thing, except that what we call thinking is, precisely, the inward dialogue carried on by the mind with itself without spoken sound.”
(*Sophist*, 263e)

Thus, one might carry on a maieutic soliloquy with one's self, drawing out wisdom with one's own inner voice, as if in prayer.

THE DUAL DIALECTIC

The maieutic method has sometimes been confused with the dialectic method, the dialectic dubiously understood to be the method of question and answer. Although the two can coincide, their distinction should become clear in the subsequent discussion.

In the *Phaedrus* (265d-266c), two “procedures” are discussed; one of bringing:

“a dispersed plurality under a single form”.
(*Phaedrus*, 265d)

And the other, a reverse, where one may:

“divide into forms.”
(*Phaedrus*, 265e)

And in the *Philebus* (16c-e), Socrates describes a method which was a:

“gift of the gods... [and] passed on,” in which one must search for a single form, and divide it, and each subsequent division as far as possible. Socrates, “a lover of these divisions and collections... [calls those] able to discern an objective unity and plurality... dialecticians.”
(*Phaedrus*, 266b)

Together, this splitting and splicing, the cutting and weaving of forms, comprise the “dialectic” method:

“the pair of arts... of universal scope, the art of combining and that of separating.”
(*Statesman*, 282b)

Socrates discusses and illustrates this dual method in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, reminding us that:

“any discourse we can have owes its existence to the weaving together of forms”
(*Sophist*, 260a)

And demanding that:

“we must in every case divide into the minimum number of divisions that the structure permits”
(*Statesman*, 287c)

As:

“the philosophical method itself... consists in ability to divide according to real forms.”
(*Statesman*, 286d)

Although one or the other of these two aspects, pluralizing or unifying, is emphasized at various times, we must remember that:

“the dialectic art never considers whether the benefit to be derived from the purge is greater or less than to be derived from the sponge”
(*Sophist*, 227b-c)

“binding... together... [and] separating... off”
(*Sophist*, 227c)

—being equally useful.

The ultimate aim of the dialectic is, of course, a:

“purification of the soul or intellect”
(*Sophist*, 227c)

—a soul or intellect on its way to recollecting the final revelation. Yet, it has a practical aim as well: clarifying hazy distinctions and bringing the implicit out into public discourse. With a particular thing:

“all that you and I possess in common is the name. The thing to which each of us gives... [a] name we may perhaps have privately before our minds, but it is always desirable to have reached an agreement about the thing itself by means of explicit statements, rather than to be content to use the same word without formulating what it means.”
(*Sophist*, 218c)

In *The Republic* Book VI (510b-511e), a finer distinction is made concerning two types of intellection: 1) a dialectic concerned only with cutting and weaving forms in order to transcend assumptions and clarify issues by finding higher principles solely on an intellectual plane (e.g. the many are one) is contrasted with 2) an intellection which is concerned with our perceivable world, and maintains assumptions that hold true with reference to that world and from which it derives conclusions (e.g. geometry): the former is termed “Reason,” the latter, “Understanding.” Reason transcends the world and concerns itself with discovering the proper relations of the eternal forms, while the understanding limits itself to the formal relations found in the temporal world. (This distinction would be important in considering the relation between the elements and other forms. Inevitably, any phenomenal-elemental investigation would reach assumptions surmountable only by dialectical “speculation.” However, Plato would probably suggest that such would be structurally consistent and knowable,

yet phenomenally un-verifiable, in the same way that we could never verify that a dog is an animal in purely physical terms.)

With this discussion of dialectical splicing and splitting of forms, and the prior discussion of forms having families, and, most of all with the demonstration of the dialectical method found in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, we get a fairly clear picture of what would have to be a complex hierarchical network of forms. Plato does not use the metaphor of a net, though. The method of division suggests that some forms are contained within others, as with categorical logic, (or the notion of the whole containing its parts) and hence Aristotle's subsequent and questionable development. But a division of one into two does not include those two within the first: they are also divided from the first, and maintain a family tie to it; we cannot think the whole with the parts. In a similar way, weaving two forms together leads to a new form distinct from the previous two. Ironically, the process of division creates connections, and the process of weaving creates schisms (but remember: one does not actually split and splice, but follows these implicit splits and splices).

The entire “logos” of forms may be impossible to picture; yet, with reference to a group of unities (“monads” (*Philebus*, 15b)) which are associated with each other by belonging to families, we may comprehend it. Hence a form of the bulldog would be a family member of the dog form, which in turn is related to the mammal form, of which the cat form is also a member. The dialectic is often illustrated with the dialectician (mysteriously and intuitively) making a leap up a family tree, and, by division, working back down to the original form, whose form is thus made more explicit. Of course, this all becomes more complicated when we consider that actions and skills are forms, and entire arts are super-forms as well.

THE TRANSCENDENT ONE MANIFESTED

The doctrine of forms receives its greatest critique in the *Parmenides*. (This dialogue makes the philosopher Parmenides out to be a bit more subtle than our existent texts of his indicate.) It is in this dialogue that we find Parmenides noting a schism between the transcendent forms, and the names and objects in our world:

“those forms which are what they are with reference to one another have their being in such references among themselves, not with reference to those likenesses, or whatever we are to call them in our world, which we possess and so come to be called by their several names. And, on the other hand, these things in our world which bear the same names as the forms are related among themselves, not to the forms, and all the names of that sort that they bear have reference to one another, not to the forms.”

(*Parmenides*, 133c-d)

In other words, there would be three different “networks” of associations for what was termed the “logos” above—the relations of forms, things, and names; and each realm would be self-referential (although names initially resemble the objects for Plato, convention changes their relationship, and they get caught up in language itself).

This problem is akin to the “third man” problem which stems from the fact that we can only understand one form in reference to another. Particulars are compared with each other by the standard of a single form, yet it would seem that we would need another form to compare the particulars with that form (*Parmenides*, 131d-132b). So beyond using the form of blueness as a standard for two blue particulars (blueness is what these two particulars have in common) another form of “super-

blueness" must be used to compare the form with the particulars ("super-blueness" is what the form has in common with the particulars), and so on in an infinite regress. The issue involved here is relativity—since the forms are what they are in relation to one another (and this is illustrated by the dialectic), no form is considered absolute in itself. No form can be used as an absolute standard of reference, and any judgment needs such a standard to be real. And, moreover, since forms, things, and names are all in self-referential realms, not only can we not make an absolute judgment within these self-referential networks, but moreover, we could not connect one realm with another to judge one by the other. This difficulty, however, is resolved in the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*, where one finds that name, thing, and form coincide in the absolute limit itself, which is the "one." One cannot go beyond this limit—it stands outside of all—and hence is the standard by which all can be judged. And, because its unity pervades all forms, things, and names, it is the single point in which all three realms converge, and are thus connected—it "grounds" the entire logos. Here I will discuss how the one is to be "understood," with mention of its relation to the dialectic.

Parmenides' account of the one may seem contradictory (contradiction is what Plato finds to "provoke thought" and helps convert the soul [*Republic*, bk.vii, 523c]), yet such comes from the dual aspect of oneness that arises with the temporal. In describing the one as the eternal whole (*Parmenides*, 137c-142b), Parmenides variously illustrates how the one cannot be understood in reference to another—for such a comparison would have at least two, and such would not be oneness. In other words, to begin to approach the one, we must dissolve all distinctions—any distinction or relation will include a plurality which is not one. This makes the one seem transcendent, for any worldly comparison would include a multiplicity. Yet, the one even transcends the distinction between the transcendent and the mundane—beyond being a-temporal, it transcends the

distinction between the temporal and eternal itself. It simply “is” everything, yet cannot be understood with reference to anything—

“it cannot have a name or be spoken of.”
(*Parmenides*, 142a)

One could endlessly list what it is not, yet for simplicity of discussion, this non-differentiated one might be roughly understood as being a transcendent and encompassing limit (of all parts of the whole).

However, in the discussion from *Parmenides* 142b, the one which was understood as a whole as we approached the transcendent is re-manifested throughout plurality. That is, as soon as we have a division, each part is itself one singularity—the unity of oneness is distributed throughout and pervades each part. Hence, no matter how many names, things, or forms you may have, each will be only one form, one thing, or one name, in so far as it actually is such. A dog may have four legs, yet it is still only one dog.

The transition from the transcendent one to the manifest plurality of unities is complex. In the *Timaeus* (37d), when the creation of time is discussed, God is said to have:

“resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity, and this image we call time.”
(*Timaeus*, 37d)

In other words, the eternal one, as a whole, contains its own image; yet the image itself is a copy of eternity, and thus being separate, it moves in multiplicity. It is with this transition from the eternal to the temporal that the transcendent whole becomes

manifest with a unified plurality (cp. a single prophet and multiple witnesses; or a single writer and multiple speakers). Any unity found in the world results from a manifestation of the one, yet the one always leaves a trail of plurality in its wake:

“as coming to be one it must be combined, as coming to be many, separated”
(*Parmenides*, 156b).

Hence, we can see that it is with the one that the dual nature of the dialectic, combining and separating, weaving and cutting, is resolved by and operates through the one. Such is akin to the etymology of “Apollo” found to be the:

“single one, the ever-darting, the purifier, the mover-together”
(*Cratylus*, 406a)

—or the “sun” which we saw above as gathering, rolling, and variegating. And so it is also recounted that:

“the Eleatic set, who hark back to Xenophanes or even earlier, unfold their tale on the assumption that what we call ‘all things’ are only one thing. [while] Later, certain muses in Ionia and Sicily perceived that safety lay rather in... saying that the real is both many and one... ‘parting asunder it is always being drawn together.’”
(*Sophist*, 242e)

—where the one is understood to be prior to the many.

This entry and exit of the transcendent one into the manifest requires a transition from the rest of eternity to the motion of temporality, and back again, which is said to take place in the “instant.” The instant:

“is situated between the motion and the rest; it occupies no time at all.... the one, since it both is at rest and is in motion, must pass from the one condition to the other... it makes the transition instantaneously; it occupies no time in making it and at that moment it cannot be either in motion or at rest.”

(*Parmenides*, 156d-e)

Interestingly, this instant might coincide with the “image of eternity” or:

“the forms of time, which imitates eternity and revolves according to the law of number.”

(*Timaeus*, 38b)

This “image of eternity” mediating between the eternal and the temporal sounds akin to some instantaneous enlightenment experience.

Now, there is also a relationship between the “one” and “being.” It is said:

“for the things other than the one it appears to be that from the combination of unity and themselves there comes to be in them something fresh, which gives them limit with reference to one another, whereas their own nature gives them, in themselves, unlimitedness.”

(*Parmenides*, 158d)

Such seems connected to the distinction made in the *Timaeus* between matter and form, where matter was said to be formless; for in both cases there is a relation between the structured and the un-structured. Yet, contrary to what one might expect, we shall see that it may not be the unlimited, or formless matter, which gives things their being.

Now, oneness as a whole, being beyond all distinctions, neither exists nor does not exist—which, practically, is as good as saying that it is nonexistent. Yet:

“if it is not to exist, it must have the fact of being nonexistent to secure its nonexistence, just as the existent must have the fact of not being nonexistent, in order that it may be possible for it completely to exist.... since the existent has not-being and the nonexistent has being, the one also, since it does not exist, must have being in order to be nonexistent.”

(Parmenides, 162a)

In other words, with the “first” distinction of the one, a limit is created between being and not-being, which are co-dependent; and the one is both of these. Yet (see *Parmenides* 162b-d), the one must pass from one state to another in the instant of transition: the one which transcends the distinction between being and non-being is manifested as unified parts with being in opposition to a transcendent (from the standpoint of the manifest) one with no being (as existence “in the world”).

However, a question arises for me here, and that concerns the one’s status as a limit—for if the transcendent one has no distinctions, then how could it be limited? Would it not be the unlimited itself? No, for it could be neither unlimited nor limited before differentiation begins, and the one is designated as that which is limited and dispenses limitation when there is differentiation. Another question might concern the one’s having existence or being in the temporal, rather than the eternal, which is supposed to be real being, as opposed to the illusory shadows of our world. It may also be that the one is non-existent from a worldly point of view, where, from a transcendent perspective, the world would be non-existent, or illusory. However, in the *Timaeus*, different types of being are discussed—for forms, models, matter, and soul. Hence, a

proper discussion would avoid this word “being” in discussions of the eternal in favor of something like “ultimate reality,” or “real being”—it is the terminology which is inconsistent, not the theoretical structure (although, in the *Sophist*, “reality” is found to be as slippery as the undifferentiated “one”).

We have seen how the one, encompassing and pervading all, ties the eternal to the temporal—as such is spun through the image of the eternal where, in the instant, transcendent oneness is fed through into multiple unities spread across time. The involvement of names in this process is so mysterious as to have led the translator F.M. Cornford to have left out what may be a key sentence of this entire doctrine (a possibly arrogant move on the translator's part). This sentence, at line 244d in the *Sophist* asserts:

“the one’ can only refer to one thing—that is to say, to a name.”
(*Sophist*, 244d)

The one does not have a name, the one *is* a name (which, of course, does not mean the physical manifestation of a spoken or written name, but the name itself—hence, “in the beginning was the word,” etc.). It is unclear whether this name is the word “one,” or the “image of eternity” (unlikely, since such is already a split in the one—but then, is not being a name already a split?—could a name pervade everything?), or it could be some secret, as with some Judaic traditions (Plato too would have to account for a personified creator distinct from the one), or something unknowable. At any rate, this would be where name, “thing,” and form truly converge in singularity.

Again, it is this one which is absolute, and while pervading all down to the smallest particular, it is also the pinnacle of all forms. And such would mean, with reference to *The Republic*, that the one is the good; of which is said:

"the objects of knowledge not only receive from the presence of the good their being known, but their very existence and essence is derived to them from it, though the good itself is not essence but still transcends essence in dignity and surpassing power."

(*Republic*, 509b)

The one too, prior to its division, would neither be essence or non-essence. Moreover, consider the following parallels in the analogy between the good and the sun (*Republic*, 508b-509b):

One	—Context	—Faculty	—Objects
Sun	—Visible World	—Vision	—Things
Good	—Intelligible Region	—Reason	—Forms

It might be suggested that the good, aside from being that which creates beauty and truth, is that which actually gives quality to the things beyond their other objectively quantifiable aspects which it “nourishes”—this is merely speculation. However, this would help to explain where the generated models of our world get their vividness, seeing that forms, as ideas, are invisible (“ideas are invisible,” *Republic* 507b), and that matter is itself void.

THE POSSIBILITY OF ERROR

A problem with understanding the one as the source of truth is that it pervades all existence, and therefore, it might seem that everything is true. Similarly, if what is is true, then there could be no falsity, for falsity would not exist. Obviously this is false, and an explanation of the possibility of falsity requires recourse to the notion of difference, as summarized in the *Sophist*, 259a-b:

“(a)... the kinds [forms] blend with one another, (b)... existence and difference pervade them all, and pervade

one another, (c)... [the form of] difference (or the different), by partaking of [the form of] existence, is by virtue of that participation, but on the other hand is not that existence of which it partakes, but is different, and since it is different from existence (or an existent), quite clearly it must be possible that it should be a thing that is not, (d) and again, existence, having a part in difference, will be different from all the rest of the kinds, and, because it is different from them all, it is not any one of them nor yet all the others put together, but is only itself, with the consequence, again indisputable, that existence is not myriads upon myriads of things, and that all the other kinds in the same way, whether taken severally or all together, in many respects are and in many respects are not.”
 (*Sophist*, 259a-b)

Logically, it would seem problematic to call existence a form, until one realizes that any sort of logical discussion of existence would require such a form, whatever the relationship between the form for existence and existence itself might be (ditto with difference, or any other abstract concept). But, it is argued here that the forms of existence and difference, actually being what they designate, allow for the isolation of being, and its ability to be associated with some forms, and not with others. Indeed, it is implied that existence, difference, sameness, rest, and motion are something like primary forms (along with the dividing and combining of the dialectic): possibly this would be some original multiple division of the one (again, compare this to the image of time). This, coupled with the limitation that:

“some of the kinds will combine with one another and some will not, and that some combine to a small extent, others with a large number, while some pervade all and there is nothing against their being combined with everything” – (*Sophist*, 254b-c)

—this suggests that just about any combination is possible (although not necessarily so). However, it means that some forms in the eternal realm could partake of, say, the form of falsity, which seems to contradict their eternal truthfulness.

The crux of the problem is this: The realm of the eternal forms is supposed to be true reality and ultimate being, while our world is illusory and becoming from and towards real being. Opinion is said to fall somewhere between this ultimate reality and its reverse—it is not knowledge of the forms, but it is better than nothing. Now, although one may form false opinions because of a failure of memory (*Theaetetus*, 190e-195b, 196d-199c), it is noted that:

“recollection’... [is] something different from memory”
(*Philebus*, 34b)

And that recollection is the way that true opinions, “tethered” by reason, become knowledge (*Meno*, 97e-98a). So, there are false opinions, true opinions, and the tied down knowledge of the recollected forms.

Now, the problem is that, although the *Theaetetus* discusses how we might have false opinions, the argument in the *Sophist* is powerful enough to allow for false knowledge. That is, it is possible that there are forms that are inherently false, and that, via recollection, we could come to have true knowledge of something false—which would be a contradiction, if we did not know it was false knowledge. The only way out of this, that I see,—a probable solution—is that the forms are somehow in harmony with our recollection of them: the only false forms would be temporal ones. This may be true, considering that the image of eternity, the form of time itself, being a copy, may be false.