

*The Idea of the Good***2.1 The Idea of the Good as the First Principle of All**

In *Republic* Book 6, Socrates says:

You have at least often heard it said that the Idea of the Good is the subject of the most important study, since it is that by means of which just things and other useful things actually become useful or beneficial.<sup>1</sup>

There are many issues raised by this passage including how the Idea of the Good is to be studied and how it actually makes justice and other things useful or beneficial.<sup>2</sup> It does seem beyond doubt, however, that what is here being claimed is, minimally, that the Idea of the Good has a fundamental role to play in Plato's moral realism. I put this claim in this anodyne manner not because I do not think that a much stronger claim can be substantiated; I do so because even such a claim has been widely rejected, especially but not only in the English-speaking world for well over a century.<sup>3</sup> It is held that the Good is redundant because justice and other

<sup>1</sup> *Rep.* 6.505A2–4: ἐπεὶ δτι γε ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα μέγιστον μάθημα, πολλάκις ἀκήκοας, ἢ δὴ καὶ δίκαια καὶ τᾶλλα προσχρησάμενα χρήσιμα καὶ ὠφέλιμα γίγνεται. Cf. *Gorg.* 474D4–E7, where the connection is between ὠφέλιμα and τὸ καλὸν or ἡδέα (pleasures) and τὸ καλόν. If something is thought to be καλόν and is not pleasurable, then it is so because it is beneficial. Also, *Protag.* 333D9 where the connection is between τὸ καλόν and ὠφέλιμα alone. The words πολλάκις ἀκήκοας (“you have often heard it said”) suggest that the doctrine of the Idea of the Good antedates *Republic*. We should not forget that Socrates is here – on any interpretation – expressing Platonic doctrine. So, the words “often heard” can reasonably be taken to at least include intra-Academic discussions or Plato's oral teaching.

<sup>2</sup> See Adam 1921, v.2, 51, *ad loc.*, who rests his claim that the Idea of the Good is Plato's “Deity” on this passage. I shall return to this interpretation in several places later in this book though I think it is mistaken.

<sup>3</sup> See the works referred to in the previous chapter, n. 5. White 2013, 25, says that “the concept of goodness” is the central concept for Plato's ethics. White cites *Rep.* 7.534B8–D1 in this regard, where the question is explicitly about the Idea of the Good, *not* a concept of goodness. If the Good were a concept, it would not even be clear that Plato is a moral realist. Delcomminette 2006, 604ff, argues that the Idea of the Good has no formal role to play in dialectic and that it has no content. Accordingly, it has no substantive role to play in ethics.

virtues are good by definition. That is, the Good does not add anything to knowledge of the Forms of the Virtues. This possibility seems challenged by the fact that the study of the superordinate Good is “the most important study.” Indeed, as we learn a bit later in the passage on the Divided Line, the study of the Good is the greatest study at least because without knowing it, we cannot even know the definitions of the Virtues, let alone know that it is good or beneficial for us to possess instances of them.<sup>4</sup>

Recognizing that the Idea of the Good makes justice useful or beneficial, one may object that then it cannot be the case that justice is intrinsically good; rather, goodness will be external to justice in some way.<sup>5</sup> Such an objection arises from a limited conception of how Plato conceives of the relation between the Good and the Forms. The Good is the explanation for the existence and essence of all the Forms.<sup>6</sup> Goodness is as intimately present to the Form of Justice as is its own οὐσία, if for no other reason than that whatever causal role the Good has in relation to Forms, it has eternally. The Good is also intimately, albeit indirectly, related to any instantiation of the Good via an instantiation of Justice and the other Forms. As a synonym for “instantiation” we might use “manifestation” or even “expression,” bearing in mind that instantiation is not instrumentality but, for Plato, participation.<sup>7</sup> In the eternal or intelligible realm, all

<sup>4</sup> See *Rep.* 6.511B2–C2; cf. 7.533C3–6. In fact, the prior necessity of knowing the Idea of the Good is not limited to the Forms of the Virtues; this is the case for all the Forms. See Dorter 2006, 198. The Idea of the Good is by Plato explicitly embedded in a metaphysical framework larger than that required by moral realism.

<sup>5</sup> See Penner and Rowe 2005, 260–269, for some salutary remarks on the unsuitability of the modern notion of “intrinsic goodness” for interpreting Plato. Their key insight is that intrinsic goodness is usually identified with morality as distinct from happiness. Thus, something can be intrinsically good and therefore morally obligatory even if it does not bring happiness. I treat of the supposed conflict of morality and happiness in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.

<sup>6</sup> *Rep.* 6.509B5–9: Καὶ τοῖς γινωσκομένοις τοῖσιν μὴ μόνον τὸ γινώσκεισθαι φάναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ παρεῖναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπ’ ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι, οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ’ ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεῖα καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος (And say that for the things that are knowable, their being known is present to them owing to the Good, but even their existence and essence belong to them owing to it, the Good itself not being essence but beyond essence, exceeding it in seniority and power). See Gerson 2020, 120–127, for more details on this and related passages. Some scholars, for example, Gould 1955, 170, take the words ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας to mean “beyond reality,” thereby justifying the claim that Plato’s intentions here are impenetrable. Of course, such an interpretation depends on what is meant by “reality.” The Good is certainly beyond *finite* reality, meaning any limitations imposed by essence or οὐσία. But that it is not beyond reality in the sense of being nothing at all is refuted by the fact that the Good is “the happiest of that which is (εὐδαιμονέστατον τοῦ ὄντος)” (526E4–5), that it is “more beautiful (κάλλιον)” than knowledge and truth (509A6), and that it is “the brightest of that which is (τοῦ ὄντος τὸ φανότατον)” (518C9). See Ferber and Damschen 2015 on why the Good, though it is “beyond οὐσία,” is not “beyond ὄν (being).” The authors, however, 202–203, reject the reality of the Good, instead claiming it to be a “chimera” or *ens verbale*, that is, “something one can not imagine but can only formulate.”

<sup>7</sup> See Timmermann 2019, 101.

relations are internal including the relation between that which participates and that which is participated in. So, Justice is intrinsically beneficial, not because of what the word “justice” means, but because of its eternal participation in the Good. And since this eternal participation is an internal relation, goodness is constitutive of the identity of Justice and the other Forms, too.

If the Idea of the Good is not relevant to the acquisition of virtue or anything else that is beneficial, or to the knowledge of it, then the following problem arises. It is a problem to which I have already alluded. Our paradigmatic malefactor, the tyrant, can without reservation concede that virtue is a good. He can also concede the supposedly “Socratic” point that what may seem to be a good is not really so if one does not know how to use it.<sup>8</sup> So much hardly steps outside the bounds of ordinary ancient Greek language and common sense. A virtue is good just because it is one of the things that people aim for, alongside health, wealth, beauty, pleasure, power, friendship, security, and so on.<sup>9</sup> They may well dispute what the virtue consists in or what its definition is, but the fact that someone pursues it means at a minimum that it is an apparent good, that is, a goal the achievement of which appears to the agent to be one that he or she truly desires. Even if the tyrant refuses to accept that some states or practices are virtues, for example, piety or justice, he can hardly wish to deny that there are *some* virtues including say, courage and endurance. And these will be at least *prima facie* goods. But at the same time, it is always open to the tyrant to say that, though some virtues are indeed goods, it is not good for him to have them or to practice them at this time and

<sup>8</sup> See *Rep.* 1.340D2–341A4, where Thrasymachus is eager to agree that only the correct use of power is advantageous. Admittedly, “correct use” is ambiguous, although we cannot assume without argument that the correct use of power will always be to the disadvantage of the tyrant *as he sees that*. As Chappell 1993, 13, shows, Thrasymachus does have his own list of virtues: strength (ἰσχὺς), liberty (ἐλευθερία), and dominance (δεσποτεία) (344C5–9), plus shrewdness (εὐβουλεία) (348D2). Chappell argues that Thrasymachus does not include justice (or injustice) on this list. But insofar as he is prepared to consider justice or injustice at all, he does so according to the criterion of whether or not it is useful or beneficial to him. So, even if Thrasymachus conceded that justice in some sense is a virtue, it must be set alongside other goods and judged according to its usefulness in relation to the others. Plato’s Idea of the Good is explicitly introduced as the explanation for what makes any virtue useful or beneficial. For Plato, the only alternative to this explanation is Thrasymachus’ one, namely, that what makes some good useful or beneficial is one’s personal “interests,” whatever these may be. This is about as far from universality as one can get. See also Rist 1998.

<sup>9</sup> On good as goal or τέλος, see, for example, *Gorg.* 468A–B, 499E; *Phil.* 20D; *Euthyd.* 279A–C. Goals are a constituent of actions including those of the vicious and the acratist. This remains true even if it is also true that everyone desires the Good. Matching the achievement of the goal to the Good is, alas, not inevitable.

under these circumstances.<sup>10</sup> Another way of putting this point is that what may appear to be goods to some people are not good for him. Or at least, they are defeasible goods when measured against others.

Given the subjectivity and the ordinality of the valuations that people – ordinary people as well as tyrants – make, it is entirely possible to recognize virtue as one good among many. Sometimes, the self-interested calculations of people lead to the practical conclusion that in certain circumstances a good other than virtue needs to be prioritized. After all, it is not unreasonable to hold that A is the most important thing *ceteris paribus*, but that B has *some* importance too, and that from time to time, one should act to attain B rather than A. To be instructed by a “Socratic” critic that there are more important things in life than B is to invite the reply, “not here and now there aren’t.” Something like this must have been going through the mind of Crito in his eponymous dialogue when, at a critical moment, he hears Socrates’ decision to privilege the good of virtue over the good of human life. Socrates’ decision in this regard does not automatically invalidate or reduce to absurdity a contrary decision by someone else.

Just a few lines after the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Socrates provides what I take to be the conclusive reason for the centrality of a superordinate Idea of the Good in Plato’s ethics. This is the passage indicating the Good as that which all desire and the fact that everyone divines that it is something, although they do not know what it is.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Brown 2007, 56, makes the perceptive observation that the good that Glaucon wants Socrates to show that justice is, is different from the good that Socrates shows it to be. This good is still mapped onto self-interest. But Brown thinks that the task is completed by the end of Bk. 4 of *Republic*, thereby ignoring the role of the Idea of the Good in identifying the universal Good with one’s own interest. If *Republic* is taken to be framed by Glaucon’s challenge, this is not finally met until the end of Bk. 9 or, arguably, the end of Bk. 10, where the indispensability of philosophy to happiness is reaffirmed. See Annas 2015, especially 56–58, for a similar reply to Brown. In reality, there is no opposition between the egoistic and the altruistic; the opposition is in appearance only.

<sup>11</sup> *Rep.* 6.505D5–E5. There are many texts in the dialogues in which Socrates indicates that people seek what is good for themselves and avoid what is bad. See *Me.* 78A6; *Gorg.* 468B1–4; *Symp.* 205A6–7; *Protag.* 358C6–D2; *Euthyd.* 278E3–6; *Lys.* 222C3–5. All of these texts contain a possible ambiguity that is in fact easily removed. One may desire what appears to be good even if it is not, and one may desire the real good because it appears to be so. The ambiguity is between nonveridical and veridical appearances. The determination of whether the appearance of good is veridical or nonveridical is a matter for metaphysics, not human psychology. This ambiguity is distinct from the possible ambiguity that arises from failing to distinguish “good” as a generic Form and “good” as indicating a superordinate Idea of the Good (see the next section). That people “divine” the Good to be something strongly suggests that the good being talked about here is not a mundane good, like pleasure or physical health, whose existence and essence require no divination. Contra Rowe 2007, 145, who thinks the good here is just that which is useful and beneficial. Burnyeat 2006, 18, takes this passage, correctly, to refer to the superordinate Good, but then claims that this is in conflict with the doctrine rejected with the tripartition of the soul of Bk. 4. The rejected doctrine is that of the so-called

Suppose that it is *not* the Idea of the Good that makes justice really good for oneself as opposed to merely being apparently good. If that which does this is not above οὐσία, then it is or has an οὐσία of its own. For example, say that what makes justice good for oneself is that the Form of Justice partakes of another Form, the Form of ἀταραξία (absence of anxiety). It is then open to the tyrant to ask why absence of anxiety should be the stopping-point. That is, why should it be assumed that absence of anxiety is really good for oneself? Or *always* good for oneself? It seems that for the possession of an instance of any οὐσία, the question of the real good for oneself continues to remain open. Hence, in order to avoid begging the question, the “good at which all things aim” must be beyond οὐσία.<sup>12</sup>

Terry Penner has argued that the Idea of the Good is just the Form of Advantage.<sup>13</sup> This seems to be taken by him to be synonymous with

Socratic intellectualism. I treat of this further in Chapter 4, although it should be mentioned in passing that a radical doctrinal difference between Bk. 4 and Bk. 6 of *Republic* is not very likely.

<sup>12</sup> The quotation is, of course, from the first sentence of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* A 1, 1094a2–3: διὸ καλῶς ἀπεφώνησαντο τὰ γὰρ αὐθόν, οὐ πάντ’ ἐφίεσθαι δοκεῖ. It is natural to suppose that the word ἀπεφώνησαντο (“they pronounced”) refers to Plato and others in the Academy. If so, Aristotle might be taken to be agreeing with Plato’s argument that the Good must be unique and superordinate though he denies that the Good is beyond οὐσία; in fact, it is, for Aristotle, the primary referent of the meaning of οὐσία. See *Meta.* Λ 7, 1076a26–28 on the identity of the primary object of intellection and of desire. See Baker 2017, 1840–1841, on the irreducibility of “good” in this sentence to “good in a kind or good for something.” Also, Baker 2021, 400.

<sup>13</sup> Penner 2007a, 93. Penner, 104, takes this claim as the central feature of his interpretation of Plato’s ethical theory as “pure prudentialism,” which he is careful to distinguish from “ethical egoism” since sometimes the prudential choice is other-regarding. So, too, Rowe 2007, who emphasizes the continuity between the meaning of what Rowe calls “agent-centered good” in the so-called early dialogues and in *Republic*. Sidgwick 1902 [1896], 22–31, is perhaps one of the early proponents of a prudentialist reading of Socratic ethics. Shorey 1895, 213ff, arguing against Sidgwick, resists the conflation of morality and prudence, but it is not clear to me why he does so. It should give pause to one holding the prudentialist interpretation of Plato’s ethics that the most clearly anti-Platonic philosopher in antiquity, Epicurus, was himself explicitly a prudentialist. See, for example, *Principal Doctrines* V and the more expansive expression of prudentialist justice at XXXI–XL (D.L. 10.139–154). See Rist 2002, 45–50, on the anti-Platonism of Epicurean ethical theory. As Mitsis 1988, 77–78, points out, Epicurus’ prudentialist conception of justice is in all likelihood consciously directed against a supersensible foundation for justice in Plato. One may state the difference between Epicurean prudentialism and the sort of prudentialism that fits within Plato’s larger metaphysical picture by pointing out that the former is defeasible, and the latter is not. For Epicurus, as opposed to Plato, it is prudent to be virtuous – for the most part. When virtue does not result in pleasure, there is no prudence in virtuous behavior. Epicurus’ position clearly reflects the position of Democritus. See Nill 1985, ch. 4. It is also reflected in David Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Another clear example of pure prudentialism that is patently anti-Platonic is found in Joyce 2001, ch. 7, who argues for fictionalism, the view that all moral claims are false, though sometimes useful. This view overlaps with a variety of views under the heading “evolutionary ethics,” where “usefulness” is parsed as “value to survival of the species.” Joyce acknowledges that the fictionalist must eschew universality. He, 185, urges one to “keep using [moral] discourse but do not believe it.” Joyce, 221–222, concedes that Gyges in *Republic*, in possession of the ring that makes him invisible, has no reason to embrace the pragmatic benefits of a moral stance. Does anyone really

a putative Form of Happiness. So, in answer to the question of why one should be just, Socrates (or Plato) would say, “because you want what is really good for yourself and what is really good for yourself is advantage, which is equivalent to happiness.” Set aside for the moment the implausibility of this interpretation based solely on the fact that the Idea of the Good is what makes *all* Forms knowable and provides truth to them, not only the so-called ethical or normative Forms.<sup>14</sup> How a Form of Advantage makes, say, Circularity knowable is, to say the least, mysterious. Penner is correct, of course, in supposing that Plato believes that all human beings desire to be happy and that for them, the real good is happiness.<sup>15</sup> Socrates insists that happiness is found in virtuous living. The tyrant protests that this might be so for the many but not so for the few. For those who are up to the challenge, the life of the tyrant is to be preferred. It is in *that* life that happiness is to be found. Penner’s Socrates is in no position to reply that it is impossible for a tyrant to be happy. This is so because either happiness is a purely formal term or else it has content, presumably, the content of Virtue. If it is a formal term, then a “prudential” Socrates has no grounds for excluding the exceptions to his rule that the tyrant claims. If the Form of Advantage has content, namely, Virtue, the tyrant, it seems, can still legitimately ask why being virtuous is more than merely apparently good.<sup>16</sup> Or he can ask why the demands of virtue are not defeasible.

The Idea of the Good has to be above οὐσία in order to attain to the universality of an ethical theory, at least for any theory that is even remotely plausibly Platonic.<sup>17</sup> Stated otherwise, the unhypothetical first principle of

suppose that such a view would appeal to the Socrates of the dialogues, who, we must not forget, adheres to his absolutist moral stance in the face of his own impending death?

<sup>14</sup> See *Rep.* 6.508E1–4 with 508A9–B7, 6.509B6–7; 7.517B7–C4. The text says that the Forms are “known (γινωσκομένους),” not “knowable.” The justification for the inference is (a) that the Good gives the “power (δύναμιν)” of knowing to knowers, which seems to imply that the Forms are *knowable*; (b) in the following analogy with the sun, the sun is said to make objects “seen (ὄρωμένους)” not “seeable,” too. But it stretches credulity to refrain from inferring that these objects are thereby made *seeable*. See Hitchcock 1982, 69, “the Good is only indirectly the cause of the power to know, by being the cause of the power of known objects to be known. The relationship between the Good and knowledge reduces to the already described relationship between the Good and truth.”

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, *Symp.* 204E.

<sup>16</sup> Barney 2010a, 366, raises the question of whether or not τὸ καλόν and τὸ ἀγαθόν can have the identical “content,” namely, a certain order or τάξις. But the Good cannot have a defined content if it is above οὐσία. Barney is right in finding an extensional equivalence between beauty and goodness as predicates. What unites the two “contents” is their relation to the first principle of all whose simplicity precludes predication. See Irani 2021, 358–359, n. 20, who rightly compares Epicurus with Callicles, the “enlightened hedonist.”

<sup>17</sup> See Plotinus, *Enn.* V 5 [32], 4.13 Henry-Schwyzler, who says that the One-Good is μέτρον . . . αὐτὸ καὶ οὐ μετρούμενον (measure . . . not itself measured). This slogan neatly encompasses the main point: If the Good were not the principle of measure but that which is measured according to that

all has to be the Idea of the Good if Plato is to have an ethical theory of any kind. Eliminating the Idea of the Good or discounting its ontological significance is tantamount to saddling Plato with the inability to advance beyond rhetoric in Socrates' exhortations to his interlocutors to live a certain kind of life. It is a mistake to conflate the universality of the Idea of the Good with the universality of any Form. For it is the uniqueness of a superordinate Idea of the Good that alone provides the requisite universality for moral realism.<sup>18</sup> This universality must be "unhypothetical" because it is a stopping-point or first principle. Only that is something sufficient (τι ἰκανόν) as an explanation, in the present case for the truth of moral claims. The explanatory stopping-point is then identical with the goal or τέλος of all action.

## 2.2 The Idea of the Good and the Form of the Good

There are a number of passages in the dialogues in which Plato speaks about a Form of the Good which appears to be coordinate with other Forms as opposed to being "above" all Forms.<sup>19</sup> By "coordinate" I mean one οὐσία among many.<sup>20</sup> So, the obvious question arises as to why a coordinate Form of the Good is not sufficient to do the job that Plato needs the Idea of the Good to do. I have already suggested the answer to this question along the lines of the absolute priority of the first principle of

principle, then the question of whether *that* measured thing should be pursued or not overall would remain open. The Good must be unqualifiedly the principle of measure and not measured. Another way of understanding the point is to note that if the Good were measured, it would be a contentful predicate. We could judge (by some other measure) whether that which had "good" predicated of it was in fact good. That which would measure and not be itself measured would in fact be the Idea of the Good. See Rawson 1996, who rejects what he calls "the Neoplatonic interpretation of the Good because Plotinus thinks that the Good or One is beyond being altogether." This view is very difficult to square with many passages in *Enneads* including those in which Plotinus says that the Good or One, for example, "brought itself into existence (ὑποστήσας ἑαυτόν)," VI 8 [39] 10.34.

<sup>18</sup> Penner 2003, 192–194, complains that on the interpretation of the Idea of the Good that he rejects and that I and others accept, the Idea of the Good "is itself perfectly good, impersonally good, and non-rationally good." See contra Annas 1997, 146, who says, "Plato parts company with someone who believes that for something to be good is always for it to be good *for* X, or *from* Y's point of view, or *a* good Z." Penner's interpretation is misguided for a number of reasons, but primarily because of the fact that since the Good is beyond οὐσία, it does not have "predicates," including the predicate "good." It is a principle of goodness analogous to the way that "one" is a principle of number (ἀριθμός) and so therefore not itself a number. Even though something may be good because it participates in a Form and the Form participates in the Good, the Good does not contain the "content" of the Form as a distinct part.

<sup>19</sup> This section is based on Gerson 2015. See *Phd.* 65D4–7, 75C10–D2, 76D7–9; *Th.* 186A8; *Parm.* 130B7–9; *Rep.* 6.507B4–6, 10.608E4–5. Cf. *Epin.* 978B3–4.

<sup>20</sup> On Forms as οὐσία see, for example, *Eu.* 11A7; *Phd.* 65D13, 77A2, 78D1; *Crat.* 386E1; *Parm.* 133C4; *Sis.* 283E8.

all. But a stronger reply can be formulated if we include the reason why a superordinate Idea of the Good does not preempt a coordinate Form of the Good such that the latter becomes otiose.

Proclus in his remarkable book of essays on *Republic* sees clearly the need to distinguish a coordinate Form of the Good from a superordinate Idea of the Good.<sup>21</sup> Proclus identifies the former as the genus of perfections (τελεώσεις) and the latter with the unhypothetical first principle of all.<sup>22</sup> The genus of perfections is distinct from the genus of substances (οὐσίαι). Among these are Human Being and Horse. Among the “species” of the genus of perfections are Beauty, Justice, Health, Strength, and so on.<sup>23</sup> What the latter all share is there are various ways in which a human being can be perfected or completed. That is, there are various ways in which we strive to bridge the gap between our human endowment and the achievements that comprise our fulfillment as human beings.<sup>24</sup> Proclus thinks it obvious that perfections as different as beauty and virtue have, nevertheless, a generic unity. This is analogous to the specific unity that, say, physical beauty and intellectual beauty have in *Symposium*. But there is an important reason why this coordinate Form of Good, the genus of perfections, cannot substitute for the superordinate Idea of the Good.

The coordinate generic Form of the Good is an οὐσία in which all its species participate. Things or states that are bad or neutral do not participate in it. Thus, the Form of the Good lacks the universality of the superordinate Idea of the Good. Its nature is absent from things that do not participate in it. This is owing entirely to its being a limited nature in

<sup>21</sup> See Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, Essay 10, 1.269.4–287.17 Kroll. Cf. *In Parm.* III 811.6–7 Steel, where the distinction is between τὸ οὐσιωδὲς ἀγαθὸν and τὸ ὑπερούσιον ἀγαθὸν. Baker 2017, 1849, n. 23, points out that Aristotle's attack on a Form of the Good in *EN A 6* is an attack on a univocal Form of the Good and not, at least intentionally, an attack on a superordinate Idea of the Good which, being beyond οὐσία, is “beyond” univocity. See also Menn 1992, 548–549; Shields 2015, 86–87; Herzberg 2017; Broadie 2021, 51–52.

<sup>22</sup> *Commentary* 1.278.22–279.2. See 1.270.29–271.25. The source of the distinction appears to be Plotinus. See VI 7 [38], 25.12–14 Henry-Schwyzler, where Plotinus references *Philebus* in distinguishing the good for human beings from the Good as first principle of all. Cf. Iamblichus, *De myst.* I 5, 15.5–11 Segonds.

<sup>23</sup> *Commentary* 1.269.19–270.20.

<sup>24</sup> See *Lys.* 221E3–6: Τοῦ οἰκείου δὴ, ὡς ἔοικεν, ὃ τε ἔρωσ καὶ ἡ φιλία καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία τυγχάνει οὔσα (So, it seems that what belongs to us is what love, friendship, and appetite happen to be of). “What belongs to us (τὸ οἰκείον)” expresses precisely the relationship between endowment and achievement. The achievement is ours, but it is not us now. Plato often uses οἰκείον synonymously with συγγενής (“akin to”) as in *Rep.* 10.611D8–612A6, where if we could see the disembodied soul, we could see that its true nature is akin to the intelligible world. The fundamental human achievement and task is the recovery of our true nature or authentic self. The state of the soul when embodied is our endowment; the ideal state of the soul is found only when it is disembodied. A disembodied soul that retains remnants of its embodied state has not yet achieved the ideal. See *Phd.* 82Eff.



which participation or lack of participation is possible.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, the superordinate Idea of the Good is not limited in any way. Everything with an οὐσία of any sort participates in it including things with radically disparate natures. It is true that Plato does not make explicit the distinction between the Form of the Good and the Idea of the Good, but since he does explicitly make the latter “beyond οὐσία,” it is not, I think, unreasonable to suppose that he means to distinguish it from anything that has an οὐσία including the coordinate Form of the Good.

The coordinate Form of the Good is the eternal foundation for facts of a particular sort.<sup>26</sup> Whether someone is or is not virtuous or healthy is an objective fact, quite independent of his or her own perceptions or beliefs. This is true generally for all the coordinate Forms which provide the explanation for the real or objective samenesses and differences in the sensible world. But the validation of a claim to objective fact, for example, that Socrates is virtuous and Calicles is not, does not and cannot answer any questions about normativity. When Plato lays down the principle that everyone desires the real good, he is not making the banal claim that everyone seeks to perfect themselves according to their own ideas of what perfection consists of. The presence of a real good as opposed to a merely apparent good is determined according to a norm, not a fact. The norm is set by nature as an achievement as opposed to an endowment. It must be a real, not a merely notional norm. Without an ontological foundation for the norm, though objectivity may still be supported, universality is not. An anti-Platonic scientific approach to ethics can be content to endorse a pallid form of normativity based, for example, on evolutionary biology or sociobiology. Or no normativity at all. Without the superordinate Idea of the Good, this is the right approach to take. On this approach, there is no room for Socrates’ absolutism. In this regard, Penner’s prudentialism is actually closer to an anti-Platonic position than to Plato’s own as expressed in the dialogues.

<sup>25</sup> Miller 1985, 182–183 with nn. 23–24; 2007, 328–339, takes the Good to be “perfection as such.” According to my reading, this confuses the co-ordinate Form of the Good, the genus of perfection, with the superordinate Idea of the Good. As we shall see, though, in Section 2.6 below, there is a close connection between perfection and unity, particularly integrative unity according to kind, that Miller himself acknowledges.

<sup>26</sup> Dorter 2006, 188, distinguishes between the co-ordinate Form of the Good and the superordinate Idea of the Good as objects of διάνοια and νόησις, respectively. See *Rep.* 7.534C4–5 for an explicit distinction between the Idea of the Good itself (αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθόν) and any other good (ἄλλο ἀγαθόν). I take it that since there can only be one superordinate Good, an “other good” must refer to something with the property of being good, that is, manifesting the Good. A failure to distinguish these could, for example, lead someone to reason that because x is good, it is the Good. According to Plato, this is how the hedonist reasons.

A multiplicity of universal norms runs up against the problem canvassed above, namely, that they will each have to have content, thereby leaving necessarily open the motivational question.<sup>27</sup> Mere objectivity is strictly compatible with relativism whether at the individual or group level. Only universality can yield exceptionlessness, like the exceptionlessness of mathematics; but only the unique universality of the superordinate Idea of the Good can yield normative exceptionlessness. There is no way to achieve normative universality or absoluteness without a unique normative principle that transcends “content.” In a hierarchical metaphysics, this principle is bound to be the first principle of being. No matter how bizarre or even repugnant one may find this view, it seems to be the view that Plato holds.<sup>28</sup>

There is a fairly obvious objection to this view, an objection found as frequently among those sympathetic to Plato’s ethics as among those who are not.<sup>29</sup> The objection is that the universality here outlined is entirely inappropriate as a foundation for the rich, contextual human world.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Crombie 1962, v.1, 273–275, defends Plato against the charge that his “concept of good” commits the “naturalistic fallacy” by Plato’s identification of this good with one form of content or another. Crombie, however, does not defend Plato on the quite obvious ground that his Good is “beyond οὐσία” and so without specific or defined content; rather, he defends him on the odd ground that Plato uses “good” to commend different sorts of behavior, thereby evading the imputation of the naturalistic fallacy. The criterion of commendation is consistency. Crombie concludes his discussion of Plato’s ethics, 281–292, by focusing on *Republic*, a discussion in which he says nothing about the Idea of the Good.

<sup>28</sup> Wreen 2018, 338–339, suggests that absolutism should not be contrasted with relativism, but rather with what is *prima facie* good. But as I am using the terms, all absolute or universal moral claims are defeasible by showing one exception. That would not be, strictly speaking, relativism, but if something is good but not absolutely good, presumably it is good for one or more but fewer than for all. I take it that that amounts to relativism of some sort. Wreen 2018, 340, concedes that what is relatively good is metaphysically grounded, that is, in what is true “for” one or more, but not for all.

<sup>29</sup> Annas 1999, 102, claims that “it is unpromising to look in the *Republic* for a direct way in which [the theory of Forms] has impact on the content of the dialogue’s moral theory.” She does this because she maintains that, even if ethics requires a metaphysical basis, the Idea of the Good is not adequate for providing this. She adduces the Stoics as arriving at similar notions of virtue with a “quite different metaphysical account.” Apart from the dubious claim that the Stoics, as materialists, have *any* metaphysical account to offer, it is the identification of the Good with the One that gives the former its ethical content. Annas claims, 111–116, that “to think that ethical conclusions can be obtained from metaphysical premises is thus to be in a muddle about what ethics and metaphysics are.” This view would, in my opinion, have some force if we were not talking about a superordinate first principle of all, which is identical with the One. This is the principle in which metaphysics and axiology converge.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Rowe 2007, 131–132, who raises this problem as besetting only those who take the superordinate Idea of the Good as the necessary metaphysical foundation of ethics. Rowe 2007, 145, n. 59, rejects an “ultra-transcendent good,” arguing that the Idea of the Good is in fact nothing but the personal or human good that is the focus of virtually all of the earlier dialogues. I agree with Rowe that “my good” and “the Good” are identical, analogous to the way that, for example, Beauty and the beauty in Helen, or Largeness and the largeness in a building, are identical. I deny that the Good is thereby to be discounted or stripped of its “ultra-transcendence.” The differences between

An exhortation to strive for and embrace the superordinate Idea of the Good should only be met with derision by anyone struggling to do good and avoid evil in real life. Plato's response to this objection is twofold. First, the Good is instantiated here below via the Forms. And the Forms are the paradigms of all possible intelligible content. That is, *any* ethical theory will ultimately need to appeal to the definitional content of Forms in order to make intelligible its normative claims. Second, the precise way in which, say, the Form of Justice is to be instantiated is not, alas, immediately entailed by a recognition of a superordinate Idea of the Good that makes just acts useful or beneficial.<sup>31</sup> One naturally struggles to find some heuristic to apply the results of having engaged in "the most important study." There seem to be at least three.

First, if Good is universal, then it is not possible that something, say, some action, should be good for A and at the same time not good for B. The obvious parallels are found in the truths of mathematics. Another way to put this is to say that if the Good is instantiated here and now, it is otiose to add "for me" to the proposition that represents the good state of affairs. Thus, if benevolent kingship is good for Athens, then it is true, but also needs no saying, that it is good for me, an Athenian citizen, that a benevolent king rules. More interesting and related to the role of the Good in illuminating the Socratic paradoxes, if it is good that I be punished for my wrongdoing, then it is good for me that I be punished for my wrongdoing. Conversely, if it is good for me that I obtain something or do something, then we can infer that it is good *simpliciter* that this occur.

How does this logical point about the universality of Good yield a heuristic? If I am right in believing that, say, just deeds are good owing to the Idea of the Good, then I can infer that they are good for me. Similarly, I can infer that it is bad for me to do an unjust deed.<sup>32</sup>

us are not trivial or merely a matter of semantics. I claim that only with the Idea of the Good in its full-strength ontological status can the universality of Plato's moral realism be preserved. Without that, we must fall back upon prudentialism, whose "universality" is a naive hope rather than the conclusion of a philosophical argument. It is as naive as the hope that a "decent" human being like Protagoras, having ascended to power, will do the "right" thing.

<sup>31</sup> One might object that the relation of instantiation of the Good or the Good via Forms turns normative predicates into instruments. See, for example, Timmermann 2019, 101. I doubt that Plato would take this as a serious criticism since the bringing about of any good *is* supposed to be an instrument for attaining the Good. That is why it is good in the first place.

<sup>32</sup> At *Ap.* 31C4–D6, Socrates explains how his daemon works: it "turns him away (*ἀποτρέπει*)" from doing things, but never "encourages (*προτρέπει*)" him to do anything. Someone who believes that goodness is one thing and that life is not a zero-sum game is going to have a demonic devotion to not interfering in the lives of others. I am assuming, of course, that Socrates' vigorous practice of

Then, my doing an unjust deed can never be in my interest. Plato surely believes this on any account of his ethics. But on the prudentialist account, it does not follow that doing just deeds is in everyone's interest even if Justice, like all the Virtues, is a species of perfection. Thus, I can never achieve my good by being unjust to anyone else. Clearly, knowledge of what justice is is crucial to the task of being just and of benefiting oneself. But this knowledge is only dispositive in determining action on behalf of my good if the Form of Justice participates in the superordinate Idea of the Good which is the object of my will. Suppose that knowledge of what Justice is includes, minimally, knowledge that intentionally harming an innocent person cannot constitute a just deed. If that is so, the heuristic indicates that one refrain from aggressing against anyone. Needless to say, agreeing to this would amount to a huge concession on the part of the tyrant. His devotion to the idea of life as a zero-sum game leads him to think that his own good can often only be advanced at the expense of others.

Let us dig a bit deeper for a more problematic case. Someone employing a utilitarian calculus might argue either that (a) if the greatest happiness of the greatest number is attained, then injustice done to the few is good or that (b) if the greatest happiness of the greatest number is achieved, then no injustice is thereby done whatever is in fact done to a few. It seems that on the basis of the universality of the Good, Plato would decisively reject both alternatives. The first is rejected in Socrates' absolutist prohibition of injustice in *Crito*.<sup>33</sup> The rejection of the second alternative follows from Socrates' refutation of Thrasymachus' definition of justice as the advantage (συμφέρον) of the stronger.<sup>34</sup> This claim is rejected for all cases of "the stronger" including the majority in a democracy. Attaining advantage for the majority presumably entails disadvantage for the minority, that is,

dialectic does not constitute interference. At *Rep.* 6.505E2, a passage quoted above, every soul "divines (ἀπομαντευομένη)" that the Good is "something (τι)," even though they cannot quite say what that is. There is, I suggest, a connection in the use of the religious language of daemons and divination. It may also be that the capacity for "divining" something is owing to our disembodied knowledge, which we struggle to recover through recollection. See *Rep.* 7.523A8, 531D5; *Phil.* 64A2–3; *Tim.* 41E2–3, where every soul is, prior to birth, shown the nature of the cosmos and its laws.

<sup>33</sup> See *Cr.* 48C6–49B6, esp. 49A4–5: Οὐδενὶ τρόπῳ φασὲν ἐκόντας ἀδικητέον εἶναι, ἢ τινὶ μὲν ἀδικητέον τρόπῳ τινὶ δὲ οὐ (Do we say that one must not willingly do an unjust deed in any way or do we say that one must do an unjust deed in one way but not in another?). I am assuming that the rejected second alternative would permit a utilitarian calculation that required the harming of the few for the good of the many.

<sup>34</sup> *Rep.* 1.338C2ff. Note that Thrasymachus contrasts seeking "one's own benefit (τὸ αὐτῆ συμφέρον)" with "the good of another (τὸ ἀλλότριον ἀγαθόν, 343c2–3)." This is the false view that the introduction of the Idea of the Good corrects.

the weaker; otherwise, it would be for the advantage of all. According to Thrasymachus, the advantage of the majority (if it is stronger) is just for all.<sup>35</sup> The rejection of this position by Socrates entails the rejection of (b). If this is so, here is a strong, albeit negative, heuristic based on the universality of the Good.

This heuristic is also sharply circumscribed since the possibility of doing something apparently good that has adverse consequences for someone sometime is considerable. And the “greater” the good that one aims to do, the greater the chance of bringing about these consequences. In the face of this, one might attempt various strategies. For example, one might introduce degrees of goodness. So, one doesn’t calculate whether doing something to A has or has not a bad effect on B, but whether bringing about A-B is, on balance, a greater good than not doing so. In other words, one tries to contextualize the effects of acting and then shape the demands of virtuous behavior accordingly. Alternatively, one might introduce a doctrine of unintended consequences or of “double effect.” According to such a doctrine, if doing something good to A has the unintended effect of producing something bad for B, then this does not “count” as a failure of virtue. Admittedly, both of these strategies are fraught with possibilities for abuse. It should also be noted, however, that truly unintended side effects of one’s behavior – if they are *unforeseeable* – cannot, *ex hypothesi*, be part of a calculation regarding doing good and avoiding evil. But often, and especially at the political rather than personal level, unintended side effects are reasonably foreseeable. At this level, it is difficult to see how an absolutist prohibition of wrongdoing would not be violated. The cascading consequences of behavior and the circumscription of the first heuristic suggest a certain skepticism about instantiating the Good or at least of trying to do so via laws or rubrics. Understandably, Plato hoped that a philosopher with knowledge of the Good would be best placed to make circumstantial judgments about how the Good should be brought about case by case.

The second heuristic for the instantiation of the Good follows from the necessary absolute or unqualified simplicity of the unhypothetical first principle of all and from its being identified with the Idea of the Good. As Plato says in *Republic*, “the virtuous person becomes one out of many (ἕνα γενόμενον ἐκ πολλῶν).”<sup>36</sup> I shall have much more to say about the

<sup>35</sup> See *Rep.* 1.338E3–4.

<sup>36</sup> See *Rep.* 4.443E1; cf. 5.462B1–2; 8.554D9–10; *Phd.* 99B5–6; *Phdr.* 246A6–7.

Good as One later in this chapter, but for now it should suffice to indicate that unification according to kind or integrative unity is a standalone criterion of goodness for Plato even though its effective implementation depends on having at hand definitions of the natures whose unity is sought, including species of living things and forms of association like a state or a family.<sup>37</sup> The optimal state for any natural or even for any artificial construct is integrative unity.<sup>38</sup> In nature, integrative unity maps the steps from endowment to achievement, from the kind of thing one is by nature to the fulfillment of that nature.<sup>39</sup> The diversity of types of integrative unity once again indicates the necessity for the first principle of all to be beyond οὐσία. The Good or One is a principle of integrative unity, and in its absolute simplicity, it is beyond any need for an integration of parts. But for this to be more than merely notional, the Good or One must be, as Plato says explicitly, the source of the being of everything that has the complexity of an existent with an essence. In eternity, endowment and achievement of integrative unity coincide; in the temporal world, where being is “spread out” across time (and space), integration is not inevitable. But it is the only way that the Good is achievable.

The third heuristic is offered in *Philebus* where we learn that the Good cannot be grasped on its own.

So, if we are not able to capture the good in one idea, let us get at it with three, with beauty, symmetry, and truth, and say that we would be most correct to treat these as in a way one and responsible for what is in the mixture [of the elements in the good life], and that it is owing to this being good that it becomes so.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See Krämer 1959, 135; 535–541, on the centrality in Plato’s philosophy of integrative unity, called by Krämer “Einheit in der Vielheit”; Beierwaltes 2002, 127–130.

<sup>38</sup> See *Gorg.* 506E1–4: Τάξει ἄρα τεταγμένον καὶ κεκοσμημένον ἔστιν ἡ ἀρετὴ ἐκάστου; – Φαίην ἂν ἔγωγε. – Κόσμος τις ἄρα ἐγγεγόμενος ἐν ἐκάστῳ ὁ ἐκάστου οἰκεῖος ἀγαθὸν παρέχει ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων; – Ἐμοιγε δοκεῖ. (Therefore, it is due to order that the virtue of each thing is something that is ordered or arranged, isn’t it? – I would say so – Therefore, when a certain appropriate arrangement comes to be in each thing, that provides the good of each of the things that are? – It seems to me so.) Cf. 455B8, 503E4ff. See Krämer 1959, 130–138, citing a number of texts in the dialogue focusing on or alluding to integrative unity as an idea. Also, see Hoffmann 1996, 15–22, on the centrality of the concepts of τάξις and κόσμος in Plato’s metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

<sup>39</sup> See Sedley 2009, 157–158: “If you make the best decision and unify your self with your intellect, you are making yourself identical with that in you which is immortal.” Also, see Jorgenson 2016, following Sedley, with some incisive remarks about achieving immortality as achieving an integrative unity.

<sup>40</sup> See *Phil.* 65A1–5: Οὐκοῦν εἰ μὴ μιᾷ δυνάμεθα ἰδέα τὸ ἀγαθὸν θηρεῦσαι, σὺν τρισὶ λαβόντες, κάλλι καὶ συμμετρίᾳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ, λέγωμεν ὡς τοῦτο οἶον ἐν ὀρθότατ’ ἂν αἰτιασάμεθ’ ἂν τῶν ἐν τῇ συμμείξει, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὡς ἀγαθὸν ὄν τοιαύτην αὐτῆν γεγενῆαι. Treating the triad “as in a way one” does not imply homogenization or the effacement of the three criteria. Integrative unity according to kind preserves the natural complexity of the kind. Cf. *Tim.* 87C5–6.

I shall have more to say about this triad of criteria in Chapter 6. Here I only want to emphasize that this triad is potentially the most powerful heuristic of all in determining whether or not the Good is being instantiated. It indicates implicitly integrative unity (“treat these as in a way one”), but it also indicates the *relational* properties of truth, beauty, and symmetry: Truth is the property of being in relation to our intellects, beauty is the property of being in relation to our desire or appetite, and symmetry is the property of being in relation to authentic imaging of it in the sensible world.<sup>41</sup> Thus, in reflecting on the truth, the beauty that attracts us, and the symmetry of the parts of real images of Forms, we have something of a guide to action.

The Idea of the Good provides truth to the intelligible world, thereby making its inhabitants knowable.<sup>42</sup> It is itself “more beautiful (κάλλιον)” than this world, drawing things to itself by drawing them to the intelligible world.<sup>43</sup> In short, the Good is the principle of beauty and truth. It is puzzling how symmetry (συμμετρία) fits into this picture until we see the Good as the One. For symmetry is virtually identical with integrative unity. All genuine symmetries are “true” images of the first principle, the paradigm of all being.<sup>44</sup> The Good or One is virtually all the intelligible world.

These three heuristics, even when used together, fall short of a comprehensive formula for determining how to live a good life or how to act so

<sup>41</sup> See *Soph.* 235D6–E2 where εικαστική τέχνη, in producing “the symmetries belonging to the paradigm (τὰς τοῦ παραδείγματος συμμετρίας),” is distinguished from φανταστική τέχνη (see 236C4), the latter “saying farewell to the truth” (236A4). Perhaps discoveries in higher mathematics provide the most vivid examples of the rough unity of beauty, symmetry, and truth. No doubt, biology is, too, a rich source of examples, especially of symmetry among subsystems operating together in the larger organic framework. For example, an ecological niche evinces the sort of balance that Plato evidently has in mind. Recent spectacular advances in the application of computational science to microbiology are particularly illuminating. It is now possible to predict the three-dimensional structure of a protein molecule on the basis of its DNA pattern or syntax alone. I think Plato would wholeheartedly endorse the claim that the three-dimensional “projection” of the DNA structure is a startling example of symmetry. A purely intelligible structure is manifested in the sensible world in bodies that are “symmetrical” with it.

<sup>42</sup> *Rep.* 6.508D10–E2. <sup>43</sup> *Rep.* 6.508E4–5.

<sup>44</sup> See *Rep.* 7.540A9, where the Good is referred to as παράδειγμα (“paradigm”). Broadie 2021, 58, denies that the Good serves as a paradigm at all; instead, “since the form of the good is identical with the forms of the virtues or the complex of them, finding out what they are is identical with exploring the nature of the good.” Broadie rejects the paradigmatic status of the Good in part because she rejects the identification of the Good with the One. See below Section 2.6. Hence, she can see no independent paradigmatic status for the Good. If, however, the Good is the One, “then integrative unity according to kind” is a perspicuous way of talking about that status.

that the Good is instantiated in it. Political τέχνη is indispensable in this regard. Nevertheless, these heuristics in fact exclude a great deal from consideration – such as utilitarianism and relativism – and are action-guiding in countless ways. Most important, these criteria make no sense without the superordinate Idea of the Good. They make no sense if achieving one's own good cannot be grounded in super-sensible metaphysics, in particular in a principle that is both without specific essentialistic content and at the same time, explanatory for all the intelligible content that there is.

I shall conclude this section with one additional consideration in favor of the necessity for distinguishing a coordinate Form of the Good and the superordinate Idea of the Good. The latter, as we have seen, makes Justice and other Forms “useful or beneficial.” The superordinate Good is not required to make any “perfection” a good. Unless we distinguish the Idea of the Good “from everything else,” we are powerless to answer the question of whether the possession of one or more of these perfections is actually useful or beneficial.<sup>45</sup> Wisdom or knowledge does not determine whether, for example, pleasure or health is a good, but only whether it will be circumstantially useful or beneficial to us to have that good. Conflating the coordinate Form of the Good and the superordinate Idea of the Good forces one to say that physical health is not something that human beings desire, *ceteris paribus*, since it is undoubtedly true that a fully healthy vicious person can do more harm to himself and to others than if he were prostrate with illness.<sup>46</sup> Conflating the coordinate Form of the Good with the superordinate Idea of the Good would also threaten the argument in Book 4 of *Republic* that justice is desirable in itself (i.e., good) just as is physical health. By contrast, distinguishing the Form and the Idea allows us to recognize and endorse the obvious fact that people want pleasure and health and so on without conceding that the unalloyed Good that they seek is identical with either of these. And indeed, achieving this Good might even require us to forgo one or more of these goods.

<sup>45</sup> See *Rep.* 7.534B8–C1: ὅς ἂν μὴ ἔχη διορίσασθαι τῷ λόγῳ ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων πάντων ἀφελῶν τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν (unless someone can give an account of the Idea of the Good, distinguishing it from everything else). Presumably, the term λόγος is being used loosely here, since there can be no λόγος τῆς οὐσίας for the Good. See Broadie 2021, 73–75, for a similar view, though her reasoning is somewhat different.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, *Rep.* 6.496B–C, where Theages evidently benefits from being sick because his sickness keeps him out of politics.



### 2.3 The Idea of the Good as Beginning and as End

The Idea of the Good is “in a certain sense the cause of all things (τρόπον τινὰ πάντων αἰτίας).”<sup>47</sup> Its causality is represented by the metaphor of “overflowing (ἐπίρυστον),” an activity that is unlimited in any way since the Good is beyond οὐσία.<sup>48</sup> It is also, as we saw in Section 2.1, that at which everything aims. The simple conjunction of these two claims yields a particularly powerful conclusion. Apparently, it was a conclusion that Speusippus, Plato’s successor, could not accept. For according to Aristotle, he maintained that the good for human beings must be separate from the first principle of all, the One.<sup>49</sup> Presumably, Aristotle mentions this because he thought that Speusippus held this position in opposition to Plato. If this is so, this supports the claim that Plato identified the Good as source with the Good as goal.<sup>50</sup> Why is the cyclicity of the identification of the beginning and the end so importantly different from the centrifugality of the Speusippian position? With the view of Speusippus or anything like it, the source of all being is no guide to the attainment of the good for human beings or for anything else. On this view, the only possible guide to that which is really good is how that appears to each one. By contrast, for Plato the source of being is the *only* guide to the attainment of the Good, whether through one or more of the three heuristics discussed in the previous section or in some other way. No doubt, this is why the Good is the object of “the most important study.” The situation of ethics within a metaphysical framework and therefore the rejection of its autonomy sets Plato’s ethical theory apart from most others.

Later Platonists made much of the coincidence of the first principle of all and the real Good that we all seek. Plotinus famously insisted that in order

<sup>47</sup> *Rep.* 7.516C1–2. This is inferred from the analogy of the sun, which is the cause of all things in nature. See 6.509B1–3. Bury 1910, 274–279, takes the Good as “the ultimate end of the universe” as well as “the principle of order, intelligibility, and reality.” Denyer 2007, 284–285, seems to identify the productive role of the Good with its role as explanation for the intelligibility of its products. The idea is that if one claims that it is good that something exists, then one has thereby explained why x exists. But the “why” is here radically ambiguous. For if it were to apply exclusively to goals, then the productivity of the Good would have to be explained similarly by a goal. But the Good’s putative goal in producing x can hardly be achieved by the existence of x, if for no other reason than that the Good is insufficiently complex to have goals or at least to have goals external to itself. The Good is “happiest” because it is utterly self-sufficient. See Leslie 1979 and Leslie 2019 on the deduction of the world from the primacy of the Good. Also, Miller 1985, 190, on the productive consequence of the Good’s self-sufficiency.

<sup>48</sup> *Rep.* 6.509B6–7. Verdenius 1954, 250, inexplicably, claims that the Good “erniedrigt sich nicht, wie der christliche Gott, sondern er lässt sich nur anschauen.”

<sup>49</sup> See Aristotle, *Meta.* Λ 7, 1072b31–34.

<sup>50</sup> See Berti 1983, 318, n. 13; Ferrari 2001; 2003, 287–290.

to know who we are we have to know where we come from.<sup>51</sup> And, naturally, we have to know who we are in order to know how to achieve our own good.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, in order to escape the suspicion that Plato has simply stipulated that the beginning is the end by giving them the identical name, it is necessary to ask for some rationale within a Platonic framework for this far-reaching claim. Here are the assumptions I find operating beneath the seemingly cavalier conflation of the answers to two questions: What is the first principle of all and what is the good life for a human being?

First, as I have already suggested, Plato is very much in line with all ancient Greek thinkers in taking nature (*φύσις*) to have a dual aspect. That is, there is a distinction between nature as an endowment and nature as an achievement. Normativity is found in the interstice between the two and depends on a first principle of normativity that explicitly transcends appearances.<sup>53</sup> What is good for someone, or some thing, is to become what it is in the fullest possible way. With this assumption, Plato takes his own path in arguing that the paradigms of the natures of things are eternal Forms.<sup>54</sup> But since there must be a first principle of all, which is the cause or explanation for the combination of existence and essence that constitutes any Form, this principle is in a way the paradigm of the natures here below.<sup>55</sup> It is uniquely paradigmatic since it is “beyond *οὐσία*.”<sup>56</sup> The first principle is the goal precisely because of its unique paradigmatic status.

<sup>51</sup> See *Enn.* V 1 [10], 1.iff.

<sup>52</sup> See Kahn 1987, 103, “At the limit, knowing the good and loving it will be only notionally not psychologically distinct.” Kahn says this in response to the claim that whereas beliefs aim to conform to the world, desires aim to make the world conform to us. If this were true, the claim that the Good is the beginning and the end would be undermined. For Plato, attaining true belief, and ultimately, attaining knowledge, automatically infuses desire. This is what the so-called Socratic intellectualism maintains. But without the Idea of the Good as goal *and* as source, the intellectualism is quixotic.

<sup>53</sup> See Jordan 2019 for an account of “natural normativity” rooted in the dual aspect of nature as endowment and as achievement. *Moral* normativity requires rationality or the ability to discern a gap between one’s endowment and what excellent achievement is. Normativity for, say, plants is analogous, though nonmoral. See Korsgaard 2009, 27, on the necessary connection between normativity and integrated unification. “The principles of practical reason serve to *unify and constitute us as agents*, and that is why they are normative” (my emphasis). We should, of course, add a further distinction between actual and ideal achievement.

<sup>54</sup> See *Parm.* 132D2. <sup>55</sup> See *Rep.* 6.509B5–9.

<sup>56</sup> See Santas 2002; Delcomminette 2006 on the Idea of Good as generic Form or Form of Forms. Both these scholars reject the plain meaning of the text that places the Good beyond *οὐσία*. Similarly, Sayre 1995, 178, who takes the Good to be “the interconnected field of eternal Forms”; Seifert 2002, 413–418. Gosling 1973, 118, says that “the vision of how everything fits in is the vision of the Form of the Good.” And yet, a vision of the first principle of all is not identical with the object of the vision. It is not Plato’s vision that caused the Forms to be.

The principal alternative to Plato's assumption of the dual aspect of nature is this. Someone with a human endowment fulfills his or her nature every day no matter what he or she does. On this view, it is a mistake to separate endowment and achievement normatively. On this view, it would still be possible to retain a distinction between first and second actuality, but the latter would have no normative significance. Even if there were a Form of Humanity, there is nothing we could do, short of dying, that would cause us to divest ourselves of our natural bodily endowment. We are fulfilling our nature at every moment. So, whatever good we seek is bound to diverge from a unique and universal first principle of all since that good can only be a function of our idiosyncratic individual desires.<sup>57</sup> On what other basis could I seek my own good? On what other basis could I discover that what appears to me to be my good is in reality not so? For I can have in principle no other guide to my real good than what appears to me to be that.

The basis for Plato's rejection of this alternative is found in Socrates' "autobiography" in *Phaedo*.<sup>58</sup> Naturalistic explanations for things being the way they are and for it being good that things are the way they are as provided by Anaxagoras are inadequate. A turn from naturalistic explanations to metaphysics is required. These sorts of explanation have a natural stopping-point in Forms, but ultimately require a stopping-point in "something adequate (τι ἰκανόν)." For example, if it is asked why Socrates is sitting in prison when he could escape death, the naturalist will provide an explanation in terms of anatomy and physiology whereas Socrates argues that he is remaining in prison because he believes that it is good for him to do so (even though, of course, dying unnaturally is not a good). Leave aside for now the explanations for things and events that stand outside human ethical considerations and appear to have no connection to the Idea of the Good. If it is indeed good for Socrates to remain, without this good being explained ultimately by the Idea of the Good, it is very difficult to see why it is good for Socrates to give up his life as opposed

<sup>57</sup> Stocker 1979, 745, claims that "something can be good and one can believe it to be good without being in a mood or having an interest or energy structure which inclines one to seek or even desire it." Thus, one can desire the bad. This view, in part directed against Plato, does not seem to me to take into account two things: (1) that Plato uses "good" as part of the analysis of the nature of action such that it is not logically possible to act for the bad (even in cases of *akrasia*, as we shall see) and (2) that the good for which we must act is always apparent, even when it is really good. Apparent goods are always in need of contextualization, especially a temporal dimension, to be understood. Taylor 1924, 82, would seem to be more accurate in reference to Plato's doctrine when he says, "he who chooses evil in preference to good does so not *because of*, but *in spite of* its badness."

<sup>58</sup> *Phd.* 92A4–102A9. See Gerson 2020, ch.3.3.

to fleeing and perhaps fighting again another day. But perhaps he believes that it is good for him to remain just because that is the way he is. Perhaps he wants to stay because of some pathological psychological state. If that is the case, then the issue morphs into a question of relativism.

If relativism turns out to be unsustainable, then the desire for the real good for oneself can only be the achievement of one's nature, the paradigm of which is the Form of Humanity whose paradigm in turn is the Idea of the Good. So, fulfilling one's nature is to approach the ideal.<sup>59</sup> But the ideal is itself only an ideal expression of the first principle of all. It is only an instrument of the first principle, which exceeds all οὐσίαι in "power (δυνάμει)." It does so because it is uniquely self-explanatory and unlimited in its activity. As we can see in the Divided Line, it is not even possible to know the Forms without "ascending" to the unhypothetical first principle of all.<sup>60</sup> If the good we all seek for ourselves were other than an instance of the Idea of the Good, the first principle of all, then there could in principle be no explanation for why something is really, as opposed to apparently, good for us. For a process of reasoning that led me to conclude that something was really good for me would still leave me with the fact that it can only appear to me that it is really good for me. If it is indeed good for me, that is not *because* it appears to me to be so. The successful defense of the claim that all human beings seek the real good requires that the real good is identical to the ultimate and "adequate" explanation or αἰτία for the being of anything.

Every Form is, of course, unique. But the uniqueness of the Idea of the Good is not the uniqueness of a Form and that fact should restrain us from taking it to be unequivocally a paradigm, even the "ultimate" paradigm. It is only analogously so. The Good is not eminently all things; if it were, we might be enticed to say that it has the predicate "paradigmatically good." If that were so, it could only be because the Good participated in *another* paradigm. It is a paradigm only in the sense that it stands to everything else

<sup>59</sup> See *Lys.* 522E3–6 (quoted above in n. 24) which makes the point clearly enough.

<sup>60</sup> That the "unhypothetical first principle of all" at 6.511B5–6 is the Idea of the Good and not, for example, the Law of Non-Contradiction as a few have proposed, is clear from a comparison with 7.532C6–7, where "the best among beings" does not, obviously, refer to a logical principle, and 533C9, where the ἀρχή of all is referring to the previous passage and 534B8 where the Good is explicitly invoked. Broadie 2021, 68–71, is I think, correct in maintaining that the Forms are not "deduced" from the superordinate absolutely simple first principle. Instead, the vision of the Good, understood to be the One, is of the "internal" connectedness of all intelligible reality, that is, as an intelligible unity. Nevertheless, she is incorrect in maintaining that the text does not indicate that an ascent to the Good is necessary for knowledge of the Forms. Subsequent to the ascent, there must be some sort of descent, even if this is not straightforwardly deductive. More on this below in Section 2.6.

analogous to the way the real paradigms – the Forms – are paradigms of the intelligible samenesses and differences found in the world. It is virtually everything, analogous to the way that “white” light is virtually all the colors of the spectrum. The relevance of this unique, quasi-paradigmatic status for moral realism is as follows. The Good, although it makes things beneficial or useful, does not provide “content” to things such that when they are good, that is because they participate in that content. The Forms are “Good-like (ἀγαθοειδῆ)” not because they participate in the “content” that is the Good but because their being is the effect of the eternal causal activity of the Good.<sup>61</sup> There is, as we shall see later in this chapter, an indirect way in which things participate in the Good by achieving integrative unity according to kind.

The charge frequently made against the interpretation of Plato according to which the Idea of the Good is the focal point of his moral philosophy depends upon the unquestionable truth that the Good is devoid of content in the sense that it is beyond οὐσία and is, therefore, absolutely simple. But for the charge to work, two additional premises are needed, namely, that which is absolutely simple can have no effects and that it cannot be an object either of desire or of thought. The Platonic rebuttal of both of these premises must be the same: The Good or One is essentially productive. It cannot produce what it is incapable of producing. Since it is ultimately the cause of everything, it is capable of producing everything. From the vast and complex array of intelligible beings in the world, we can immediately infer that the Good/One has the power to produce these. That is why it exceeds all intelligible being in its power.<sup>62</sup> The supposed content of which the Good/One is bereft is actually the entire intelligible world, so long as this is understood to be an effect rather than an explanatory terminus. The Good that we all seek must be the Good from which we all come because any putative content sought for other than the Good can always be “deconstructed” as effect and not as cause. As such, the question still remains as to what makes this effect good. The answer to this question is always: the Good in which it partakes. And it is that that we are seeking. The Good is not “empty”; it is the cause of the being of all there is. Its productive causality consists in its “overflowing,” which it does eternally. Everything desires the Good

<sup>61</sup> See *Rep.* 6.509A3, which actually refers to knowledge and truth as Good-like. Knowledge and truth come from the Good, 6.508D10–E2, and are extensionally equivalent with the Forms or intelligible being.

<sup>62</sup> See *Rep.* 6.509B8–9. *Soph.* 247E5 gives us power (δύναμις) as a criterion (ἄρος) of being. The Good infinitely exceeds the power of anything with οὐσία.

because the Good is the principle of one aspect in the duality of nature, the aspect of achievement. It could only be this if it is also the source, “containing” in itself virtually everything it produces. The Good produces all the things whose goods consist in the fulfillment of their natures, natures which are what the Good is virtually. To achieve one’s end is to arrive at one’s source.

## 2.4 The Idea of the Good and the Demiurge

In *Timaeus*, Plato introduces “the maker and father of this universe (τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντός),” the Demiurge.<sup>63</sup> This maker is “good (ἀγαθός).”<sup>64</sup> And because he is good, he is not “grudging (φθόνος).”<sup>65</sup> Therefore, he “willed (ἐβουλήθη)” that the cosmos he was about to create should be good, too, as near to being like himself as possible.<sup>66</sup> In fact, he desired that the cosmos should be as good as possible.<sup>67</sup> On the basis of this description alone, many Platonists throughout history have been irresistibly drawn to the conclusion that the Demiurge is to be identified with the Idea of the Good.<sup>68</sup> It is hardly

<sup>63</sup> *Tim.* 28C3–4. <sup>64</sup> *Tim.* 29E2, E1.

<sup>65</sup> *Tim.* 29E2. A lack of grudging follows necessarily from being good since the Good is a principle of ungrudgingness in its eternal overflowing. The more something is “Good-like” the more it is ungrudging or overflowing in goodness. The Good is not ungrudging itself because it has no properties including this one.

<sup>66</sup> *Tim.* 29E2–3. <sup>67</sup> *Tim.* 30A1–2.

<sup>68</sup> See especially Krämer 1967 [1964], who gives a detailed account of the “*Nus* Theologie” of many (but not all) Middle Platonists. Also, Boys-Stones 2018, 148–149, with translations of some of the most relevant texts, and Ferrari 2020. Alcinous, *Handbook of Platonism*, ch. 10, is an outstanding example of this view, calling the intellect that the Demiurge is “the primal god (ὁ πρῶτος θεός)” (164.22 Whittaker). He leaves no doubt about the identification of the Demiurge and the Good (164.36). See also 179.41–42. Alcinous is undoubtedly representative of one standard Middle Platonic interpretation. Verdenius 1954, 243, 247–250, identifies God with the Idea of the Good, but realizes that the Demiurge must be subordinate to the Good, principally because the Demiurge does not create the Forms. But contrary to Verdenius, the very reason for denying the supremacy of the Demiurge is the reason for denying the supremacy of all the Forms, namely, that they are derived from the Good. See Van Riel 2016, ch. 3, on the Aristotelian basis for this interpretation and on the various modern interpretations. See also Bordt 2006, 145–187, who argues for the identity of the Demiurge and the Good, stressing the nonidentity of the Demiurge and the Living Animal. Benitez 1995, 119–140, takes a slightly more nuanced approach to the identification of the Good and the Demiurge, though finally affirming their extensional equivalence. Benitez, however, bases this false interpretation on the sound insight that Plato wants to identify ultimate efficient and final causes. Rist 2012, 231, following Guthrie 1975, 512, claims, “But if the Demiurge is pure Mind – that is, a purely immortal and immaterial substance – he is by that closer to being identified with what is all along and undoubtedly purely immaterial – namely, the Good itself.” This view is developed in the following pages, 232–241. See Solmsen 1942, 72, for a sounder evidence-based conclusion, “For the philosopher, the source, standard, and criterion of good is not God, but the Idea of the Good.” Long 2021, 77–78, largely follows Adam and Bordt in making the Good Plato’s “supreme god.” Rice 2000, chs. 4 and 5, argues for an “abstract conception of God” that he identifies with goodness. But,

surprising that early Christian Platonists should be drawn to this conclusion, too. The principal reason for this is that if the Demiurge and the Good are conflated, then the Christian God can more plausibly be identified with both.<sup>69</sup> So, God is the first principle of all and God is provident and has or is an intellect. But in *Timaeus* itself, the text seems implicitly to deny this identification. In the course of a discussion of the principle of necessity and of the world prior to its being made a cosmos, Timaeus says,

We are not now going to speak of the first principle or principles of all, or however we are to speak of these, if for no other reason than because of the difficulty of clarifying these matters given our present method of proceeding.<sup>70</sup>

Since the Demiurge has already been spoken of extensively, it seems straightforwardly to follow that the Demiurge is not the first principle of all.<sup>71</sup> The only thing that might lead us to hesitate in drawing this conclusion is that Timaeus refers to “first principle or principles.” One might suppose that “principles” cannot refer to the first principle and hence not to the Good. But the ambiguity is easily resolved on the basis of Aristotle’s testimony, according to which Plato posited two principles, the One and the Indefinite Dyad, identifying the former with the Good. For our purposes, we can leave aside for now in what sense the Indefinite Dyad is a principle. However exactly it is related to the Good, identified with the One, does not change the fact that the Demiurge is *not* the unhypothetical first principle of all, and therefore is not God, understood in the Christian

according to Rice, this abstract God is capable of interacting with persons and so is itself a person. This identification is not shared by Plato.

<sup>69</sup> This is the idea that seems to be behind the argument of Cook 1896, section 3. Cook completely ignores the Idea of the Good in his construction of the metaphysical basis of Plato’s ethics. Nettleship 1961 [1897], 232–233, makes the observation that “‘the form of the good’ in the *Republic* occupies the place in regard both to morals and to science which the conception of God would occupy in a modern philosophy of morals and nature, if that philosophy considered the conception of God as essential to its system.” See Adam 1921, v.2, ad 505A2, who endorses the widely held nineteenth-century view that the Good is to be identified “with [Plato’s] philosophical conception of Deity.”

<sup>70</sup> *Tim.* 48C2–6: τὴν μὲν περὶ πάντων εἴτε ἀρχὴν εἴτε ἀρχάς εἴτε ὅτι δοκεῖ τοῦτων περὶ τὸ νῦν οὐ ῥητέον, δι’ ἄλλο μὲν οὐδέν, διὰ δὲ τὸ χαλεπὸν εἶναι κατὰ τὸν παρόντα τρόπον τῆς διεξόδου δηλώσαι τὰ δοκοῦντα; cf. 53D4–7. See Szlezák 1997, 198.

<sup>71</sup> See De Vogel 1986, 210; Enders 1999, 158–160; Perl 2014, 61–65. Contra Seifert 2002; Lavecchia 2006, 116–117, 216–222. Benitez 1995, 129, takes the reference to “principle or principles” to be a reference to Forms. It would be surprising if Plato were here telling us that he is declining to speak about Forms. And to what would the singular “principle” refer? Presumably, the “present method of proceeding” is to be contrasted with the method of dialectic as explained in *Republic*.

sense, nor is he the source of normativity. For he is good, not the Good.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, because he is an intellect, he has an οὐσία.<sup>73</sup> And thinking all the Forms contained within the Living Animal means, minimally, that his intellect is informed by these in all their complexity.<sup>74</sup> Hence, he cannot be beyond οὐσία or absolutely simple in the way that the Good must be.

Perhaps the most important consideration militating against the identification of the Demiurge and the Good is this. The Demiurge is required to work on the Receptacle and the precosmic chaos in order to bring about the best possible image of the intelligible world. He is undoubtedly *constrained* by the circumstances presented to him. He is confronted with “necessity (ἀνάγκη).”<sup>75</sup> He is constrained because he has or is an intellect which is his οὐσία. That is what he is. His οὐσία is, by definition, a principle of limitation: to have an οὐσία is to be *this* and *not that*. These constraints indicate, or more accurately, define the nature of the Demiurge. He can do only what he can do with the material at hand because he is the good intellect that he is. Since the Good is beyond οὐσία, there is no way to attribute a definitional limitation to it. To say that it was constrained by the precosmic chaos would be to imply that there is something about its nature or οὐσία that makes this precosmic chaos a constraint on it. So, in addition to the other reasons given above, it seems quite clear that the Demiurge cannot be identified with the Good, the first principle of all.

This leaves us with the question of how the Demiurge is related to the Good and specifically, what role the Demiurge plays in Plato’s moral theory. The refusal to conflate the Demiurge and the Good yields some fairly obvious conclusions.<sup>76</sup> First, providence is not to be attributed to the Good. This is solely within the purview of the Demiurge and the gods he creates.<sup>77</sup> Second, the goodness of the Demiurge means that he is not a principle of normativity, but rather that he conforms to it.<sup>78</sup> So, an

<sup>72</sup> As emphasized repeatedly by Proclus, *In Tim.* I 304.5, 305.8, 359.20–360.4 Diehl. And he is “a happy god (εὐδαίμονα θεόν),” 34B8, not like the Good in *Republic* which is “happiest.”

<sup>73</sup> See *Tim.* 39E7–8, 47E4. <sup>74</sup> See *Tim.* 30C2–31A.

<sup>75</sup> See *Tim.* 47E5–48A5 where it is clear that the Demiurge must work to persuade (πείθειν) necessity, though he cannot completely overcome it. See Ilievski 2014, 215–222. As Ilievski notes, 220, “[the Demiurge] is omniscient and omnibenevolent, but not omnipotent as well.”

<sup>76</sup> At *Phil.* 22D7–8, we learn that νοῦς is “more akin to (συγγενέστερον)” and “more like (ὁμοιότερόν)” that which makes good things good than is pleasure. The “proximity” of νοῦς to the Good reinforces their actual nonidentity.

<sup>77</sup> See *Tim.* 40E3–4 on the γένεσις of the traditional gods.

<sup>78</sup> Atticus, fr. 12 des Places (= Proclus, *In Tim.* I 305.6–16 Diehl), notes explicitly that the Demiurge is called “good” and not “the Good.” Nevertheless, he proceeds to conflate them. Ferrari 2020, 244–245, points out in defense of Atticus’ position that *Tim.* 37A1, in reference to the Demiurge (τῶν



investigation of normativity can appeal to the Demiurge as a supreme example of goodness, but he himself is only an example. His goodness is not self-explanatory; it is derived. Third, such “personal” attributes as the Demiurge has, including being ungrudging and desirous of the goodness of his creation and deliberating about how to achieve his goal, do not belong to the first principle of all. It is true that the Good is called in *Republic* “most happy (εὐδαιμονέστατον).”<sup>79</sup> But this term does not necessarily indicate anything personal. The most salient feature of happiness in Greek thought is self-sufficiency, and though this is typically attributable to persons or gods, it is not implausible that the self-sufficiency of the Good follows from its absolute simplicity, not from its having attained whatever it needs, since it is impossible that the Good needs anything.<sup>80</sup> It is precisely the absence of absolute simplicity that produces *insufficiency*, especially in such things, like human beings, in whom there is a gap between endowment and achievement and in whom ungrudgingness is an achievement not an endowment.

If the Demiurge is irreducible to the Idea of the Good, this fact raises the obvious question of what purpose the Demiurge serves. The principal one seems to be to account for the order or intelligibility of the cosmos.<sup>81</sup> This is what νοῦς and only νοῦς is able to do. The cosmos is intelligible to us because intelligibility was put into it by an intellect. Intelligibility is essentially communication among or between intellects. That is what “dialogue (διά-λόγος)” is. The Good alone cannot account for this because the Good does not have intelligibility strictly speaking, that is, it is not an οὐσία. The Demiurge is the locus of all intelligibility represented by the Living Animal which it eternally contemplates.<sup>82</sup>

νοητῶν ἀεί τε ὄντων ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀρίστου [by the best of beings among eternal intelligibles]), and *Rep.* 6.532C6–7, in reference to the Good (τοῦ ἀρίστου ἐν τοῖς οὐσι [the best among beings]), could be taken to refer to the same thing. So, too, Lavecchia 2010, 58–59. What Atticus evidently misses, however, is that the Demiurge is the best “among intelligibles,” and the Good, which is beyond intelligibility because it is beyond οὐσία, is the best absolutely. See Perl 2014, 64.

<sup>79</sup> *Rep.* 7.526E4–5, referring to E2.

<sup>80</sup> See *Phil* 20D4–6: ΣΩ. ἰκανὸν τὰγαθόν; ΠΡΩ. Πῶς γὰρ οὐ; Καὶ πάντων γε εἰς τοῦτο διαφέρειν τῶν ὄντων (Soc.: Is the Good sufficient? Pro.: How could it not be? It certainly differs from all beings in this). At 67A5–8, it appears that “sufficient (ἰκανόν)” and “self-sufficient (αὐτάρκης)” are being used synonymously of the Good. These are what the Good possesses or, rather is, and neither intellect nor pleasure possesses. Jaeger 1943 [1936], v.2, 286–288, takes the happiness of the Good to indicate not its self-sufficiency but its virtue since Plato identifies the virtuous with the happy. This cannot be correct since the Good, beyond οὐσία, is beyond virtue.

<sup>81</sup> See Mohr 1989, 299–300, on the crucial and unique role of the Demiurge in the introduction of measures or standards into the phenomenal world. As Mohr shows, these measures and standards constitute the intelligibility of the sensible world.

<sup>82</sup> See Diès 1927, v.2, 550, who felicitously expresses the distinction between Demiurge and Forms as “le Sujet par excellence” and “l’Objet par excellence.”

The point of all this for moral theory is that while knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) may in some sense be both necessary and sufficient for virtue, this is only the case if that knowledge somehow reaches beyond the intelligible Forms and beyond the Demiurge to the Good itself. The Good does not just make the Forms to be the intelligible entities that they are but it also makes them knowable and makes participating in them beneficial. The normativity of moral realism is mostly a bluff or a charade without the superordinate Good. This is the lesson of the Divided Line and the surrounding texts in Book 6 of *Republic*. Hence, desiring the real, as opposed to the apparent, good requires that there exists a real Good over and above all the Forms. The role of Forms is instrumental to the imposition of normativity in nature, as is the νοῦς that effects the imposition. It is never sufficient to know what the Form of Justice is. It is also necessary to know that being just is one way to instantiate the Good. If anyone desires anything, it is because it is a *prima facie* manifestation of the Good.

What is true for the Demiurge is, a fortiori, true for the gods he generates. These gods are two removes from the principle of normativity. Their being providential and benevolent, as explained in *Laws* Book 10, is not because they are normatively or ontologically fundamental but because, like all living things, they desire the Good and are themselves good insofar as they achieve what they desire.<sup>83</sup> Hence the old chestnut, deriving from *Euthyphro*, which inquires whether something is good because the gods desire it or the gods desire it because it is good, is answered decisively by the latter alternative.<sup>84</sup> The gods do not make virtue good by loving virtue or practicing it. These gods are powers in the cosmos, obviously more powerful than us since they are immortal. But they are not determinants of what is good and evil. And insofar as they can be imagined to be involved in punishing the wicked and rewarding the virtuous, they are servants of the well-run cosmos instituted by the Demiurge. In the matter of ethics, Plato draws his principles from metaphysics, not from theology.

## 2.5 Assimilation to God

In the so-called digression in *Theaetetus*, Socrates delivers an exhortation to the distinguished mathematician Theodorus regarding the aims of philosophy.

<sup>83</sup> See *Rep.* 2.379B–C, 380C; 10.617E.      <sup>84</sup> See *Eu.* 10A2–3.

Evils, Theodorus, cannot be left behind, for there is of necessity something always opposed to the Good, nor are evils located among the gods; rather, they loiter around the mortal nature and the world here by necessity. For this reason, we should try to flee from this world to the divine world as quickly as possible. And this flight is assimilation to god as much as is possible, assimilation meaning to become just and pious with wisdom. But, my good man, it is no easy thing to persuade people that pursuing virtue and shunning vice are not to be done for the reason that people give. The reason for pursuing the one and shunning the other is not that the one is useful and the other is not just for the purpose of appearing not to be evil and appearing to be good. That is just an old wives' tale, or so it seems to me. Let us state the truth in this way. God is in no way unjust; on the contrary, he is as just as possible, and no one is more assimilated to him than one who becomes as just as possible.<sup>85</sup>

For ancient students of Plato, the words “assimilation to god (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ)” express pithily the culmination of Plato’s ethics.<sup>86</sup> The flight from evils is in the direction of the Good; it is the return to the source, as we have just seen. That flight consists in the practice of virtue with the addition of wisdom, precisely the wisdom that was absent in the man in *Republic* Book 10 who was virtuous merely by “custom (ἔθει)” “without philosophy (ἄνευ φιλοσοφίας).”<sup>87</sup> It is clear from this passage, however, that fleeing toward the Good does not mean something like a mystical union with it. The successful flight puts one in the company of the god or gods who themselves are subordinated to the Good. That this is the result follows from the nature of the assimilation, or more literally, the “making the same as.” For one does not transcend οὐσία by the assimilation; on the contrary, one

<sup>85</sup> *Th.* 176A5–C2: Ἀλλ’ οὐτ’ ἀπολέσθαι τὰ κακὰ δυνατόν, ὡς Θεόδωρε – ὑπεναντίον γάρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀεὶ εἶναι ἀνάγκη – οὐτ’ ἐν θεοῖς αὐτὰ ἰδρῦσθαι, τὴν δὲ θνητὴν φύσιν καὶ τόνδε τὸν τόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης. διὸ καὶ πειρᾶσθαι χρὴ ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε φεύγειν ὅτι τάχιστα. φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν. ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι. ἀλλὰ γάρ, ὡς ἄριστε, οὐ πάνυ τι ῥάδιον πείσαι ὡς ἄρα οὐχ ὧν ἕνεκα οἱ πολλοὶ φασὶ δεῖν πονηρίαν μὲν φεύγειν, ἀρετὴν δὲ διώκειν, τούτων χάριν τὸ μὲν ἐπιτηδεύειν, τὸ δ’ οὐ, ἵνα δὴ μὴ κακὸς καὶ ἵνα ἀγαθὸς δοκῆ εἶναι. ταῦτα μὲν γάρ ἐστιν ὁ λεγόμενος γραῶν ὕβλος, ὡς ἐμοὶ φαίνεται. τὸ δὲ ἀληθές ὧδε λέγωμεν. θεὸς οὐδαμῆ οὐδαμῶς ἄδικος, ἀλλ’ ὡς οἷόν τε δικαιοτάτος, καὶ οὐκ ἐστὶν αὐτῷ ὁμοιότερον οὐδὲν ἢ ὅς ἂν ἡμῶν αὐτῶν γένηται ὅτι δικαιοτάτος. Cf. *Rep.* 6.500B8–C8; *Phdr.* 252C3–253C6. Note that the central books of *Republic* are said by Socrates, 8.543C4–6, to be a digression as well.

<sup>86</sup> See especially Lavecchia 2006, 293–296. Also, Drefcinski 2014. In the Platonic tradition, much turns on whether the recognition of this fact is or is not coupled with the identification of the Demiurge and the Idea of the Good. See Männlein-Robert 2013, who argues that it is only in later Platonism beginning with Plotinus that the formula “assimilation to god” takes on prominence. I rather doubt this. It is prominent in both Plato and in Aristotle, for a start. And there are many Middle Platonic references to the idea. See Lavecchia 2006, 418, n.4 for some of these. Also, Karamanolis 2004.

<sup>87</sup> *Rep.* 10.619C8. Cf. *Phd.* 82A10–B3. I am assuming that “to become just and pious” stands for all the virtues. See, for example, *Gorg.* 507A5–C7 where it is said that the “just and pious (and, therefore, courageous)” man is “perfectly good (τελέως).”

reverts to or appropriates one's own divine nature. That nature is the nature of an intellect, eternally contemplating intelligible being. Thus, we are made to be like the Demiurge by engaging in intellectual activity. And, as is also the desire of the Demiurge, we are made like the Living Animal by being cognitively identical with all the Forms it contains. That is, for example, the *only* way that an intellect can be made to be the same as a hippopotamus or a triangle.

In light of the *Republic* passage, we are obliged to say that wisdom or philosophy is an essential addition to virtue in order for assimilation to occur. Why? A by-now-venerable answer to this question is that the knowledge is an essential addition because this knowledge reveals how to be virtuous or how to put virtue into practice. It is the knowledge of a τέχνη. This interpretation is unsupportable for several reasons. First, as *Republic* Book 10 shows, the character without philosophy who chooses the life of a tyrant is already virtuous. That he is so by custom does not change the fact that he is not in need of knowledge of a τέχνη of how to do virtuous deeds. If it is objected that what he needs is not this sort of knowledge, but the knowledge of how to *be* virtuous, that is, how to have a virtuous disposition, it is far from clear what sort of τέχνη this is supposed to be.<sup>88</sup> The knowledge that, added to virtue, makes one like the gods, and that turns mere virtuous behavior into true virtue, is the knowledge that philosophers seek in *Republic* and in *Symposium*. It is knowledge of the Good, which is not esoteric knowledge of some secret “content,” but knowledge that the Good is the One, virtually all intelligible being. Knowing that the Good or One is universal, we at least know that our happiness, our real good, cannot be achieved at the expense of anyone else. Practicing ordinary or “demotic” virtue is a simple and useful technique that contributes to achieving this goal. But it could never be sufficient without the knowledge – not belief – that one's own good is the good of an intellect, not that of an embodied human being. This knowledge is not otherwise available to human beings than as the culmination of philosophical education and it alone results in the self-transformation that consists in “becoming one out of many.”<sup>89</sup> And

<sup>88</sup> See *Protag.* 339E5ff, where in the interpretation of Simonides' poem, Socrates says Simonides distinguished between “becoming (γένησθαι)” and “being (ἔμμεναι)” “good (εὐθλόν)” (340C4–5). As Frede 1992, xiii, points out, citing several passages in Thucydides, the word “becoming (γένησθαι)” seems to be used here to refer to behavior, whereas the word “being (ἔμμεναι)” refers to the disposition to behavior.

<sup>89</sup> See Murdoch 1970, 84, “anything which alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity and realism is to be connected with virtue.” Murdoch's view of the Good is sufficiently unlike that of Plato to have led her to assume an opposition between selfishness and unselfishness. If

it follows from the possession of this knowledge that one's true good cannot be achieved at the expense of anyone else.

## 2.6 The Idea of the Good and *Erōs*

Seen in the light of all the above, Diotima's speech in *Symposium* takes on a new clarity. Diotima instructs Socrates that love (ἔρως) is for beautiful things (τῶν καλῶν).<sup>90</sup> But this amounts to, says Diotima, a love for good things (τῶν ἀγαθῶν), that is, the possession of good things.<sup>91</sup> And the result of possessing good things is happiness (εὐδαιμονία), which all human beings wish for (βούλεσθαι).<sup>92</sup> So, love is nothing but the desire or appetite (ἐπιθυμία) for good things or for happiness.<sup>93</sup> The nexus of concepts here follows without deviation from what we have already seen in *Gorgias* and *Republic*. We all desire what is in fact good for ourselves and nothing else. A sharp distinction needs to be made between the things that seem or appear to be good for ourselves but are not and the things that really are. What *Symposium* adds is the extraordinary identification of the desire for good things with the love of beautiful things.<sup>94</sup> ἔρως evidently includes both the desire for the apparently beautiful and the desire for the really beautiful. This last point is a crucial part of the puzzle since the cycle – remaining (μονή), procession (πρόοδος), and reversion (ἐπιστροφή) – needs to include everything there is.<sup>95</sup> No one does not desire to possess manifestations of the Good insofar as this is possible. But people, including lovers and tyrants and ordinary folk, do not frame their desires in this way. The answer to the objection that not all desire the Good by their own showing is that ἔρως is a common feature of all living things and ἔρως is nothing but a desire to possess the beautiful (whether merely apparent or real), which is in fact identical with a desire for good things. People desire the apparently beautiful because they suppose that it is really good.

my good and any manifestation of the Good are identical, this opposition disappears. I take it that unselfish behavior is what one would expect in someone who is virtuous "by custom" without philosophy. Plato thinks that for such a person, unselfishness is defeasible *in extremis*.

<sup>90</sup> *Symp.* 204D4; cf. 201E5. At 206E2, we have the singular τοῦ καλοῦ, instead of the plural τῶν καλῶν.

<sup>91</sup> *Symp.* 204D7. I take it that Plato assumes that beautiful things and good things are extensionally equivalent. That is, what makes something good, integrative unity or fullness of being, is what makes it beautiful or attractive and vice versa.

<sup>92</sup> *Symp.* 204E6–205A3; 205E7–206A4. Cf. *Euthyd.* 278E3–6, 282A1–7; *Me.* 88C3; *Phil.* 20C–21A.

<sup>93</sup> *Symp.* 205D1–3. <sup>94</sup> See Krüger 1948, 158–164.

<sup>95</sup> The cyclical triad, remaining, procession, and reversion, often acknowledged as a central feature of Neoplatonic metaphysics, is rooted as firmly in the texts of the dialogues as any interpretation could be. The Good, while remaining eternally the Good, overflows ("processes"), and all things, both eternal and temporal, desiring the Good, revert to it.

The representation of ἔρως as midway between immortal and mortal – a daemon – is quite explicitly intended to establish its unifying role. “Being in the middle of the two [immortal and mortal], they [daemons] complete the whole and bind fast the all to itself.”<sup>96</sup> Love is essentially a unificatory process like higher cognition.<sup>97</sup> In fact, as we learn at the completion of the higher mysteries, the highest expression of love *is* the highest form of cognition. And, of course, this is why the philosopher is the quintessential lover and why philosophy uniquely has the unificatory and transforming effect on the person.<sup>98</sup>

Another important feature of Diotima’s discourse is her claim that the work (ἔργον) of love is birth in beauty, whether in body or soul.<sup>99</sup> It is misleading to translate ἔργον as “object” or “goal” as if ἔργον were synonymous with τέλος. For artifacts, the working or operation of that artifact may well be equivalent to its goal. The question “what does it do?” can be equivalent to the question “what is it for?” but this is not the case for things that exist by nature. The ἔργον of a human being is rational living; the τέλος of a human being is happiness. These are of course closely related, though nonetheless not identical since in the dual aspect of nature, rationality is an endowment whereas happiness is an achievement. What ἔρως does is give birth in beauty or, more expansively, in the presence of the beautiful. The τέλος of ἔρως is, as we have already seen, different; it is the possession of good things or happiness.<sup>100</sup> That ἔρως is naturally productive is a crucial feature of the entire system. For the Good is eternally productive and eternally happy, that is, self-sufficient. So, possession of the Good or any manifestation of it has the result of being productive.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>96</sup> *Symp.* 202E6–7: ἐν μέσῳ δὲ ὃν ἀμφοτέρων συμπληροῖ, ὥστε τὸ πᾶν αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συνδεῖσθαι. Cf. *Phd.* 99C5–6 οὐ τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ δέον which binds (συνδεῖν) and connects (συνεχεῖν) everything. See Krüger 1948, 154.

<sup>97</sup> See *Phil.* 15D4: φαμέν που ταῦτόν ἐν καὶ πολλὰ ὑπὸ λόγων γιγνόμενα περιτρεχειν πάντη καθ’ ἕκαστον τῶν λεγομένων αἰεὶ, καὶ πάσαι καὶ νῦν (we say, I suppose, that it turns out always that in each of the statements we make one and many come to be identical by means of the statements, in the past and even now). In a simple predicative statement, e.g., *Soph.* 263A2, “Theaetetus is sitting,” the “many” (“Theaetetus” and the predicate “is sitting”) are also “one” (“Theaetetus is sitting”).

<sup>98</sup> *Symp.* 204A1–B5. <sup>99</sup> *Symp.* 206B1–8.

<sup>100</sup> See Penner 2011, 268, who conflates ἔργον and τέλος in the case of science or expertise, of which virtue is one. So, the ἔργον of the virtuous person is just the τέλος. The conflation seems inevitable if the superordinate Good is left out of the analysis or, like Penner, is understood as “the Form of Advantage.”

<sup>101</sup> Mackie 1977, 23–24, takes it as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Plato’s view that acquaintance with the Idea of the Good will provide sufficient motivation for virtue. This acquaintance with the Good is indeed the knowledge that is sufficient for virtue, though we must add the proviso that the knowledge is in fact of the identity of my own good and the Good itself. Knowledge of the Forms alone, were this possible, would not be, as Mackie insists, sufficiently motivating. See Cooper 1999, 145–148; Kahn 1987, 102; Singpurwalla 2006b, 279. This interpretation is disputed

It is an indication of the Good's universal causal scope that the vast variety of natural desires all result, with their satisfaction, in production.

But in addition to the differences between beautiful things, the difference between the apparently beautiful and the really beautiful matters to what is produced. That is why only the philosophical lover, when possessing the Good, produces true virtue.<sup>102</sup> Everyone else produces at best images of virtue or, at a further remove, images of themselves.<sup>103</sup> The possession of the Good that produces true virtue is, of course, the knowledge of τὸ καλόν.<sup>104</sup> This knowledge or vision is usually understood to be a reference to the Form of the Beautiful, although the question of why this Form alone should produce true virtue is rarely asked. Would not knowledge of a Form of Virtue or of the individual Forms of the Virtues be a more plausible object of knowledge productive of true virtue? We have, though, already had the claim that makes it implausible to say that the philosophers' achievement of the object of his love is a single Form. The love of beautiful things is nothing but the love of good things. And every Form is good insofar as it participates in the Good. It seems much more plausible to suppose that τὸ καλόν should be read attributively, that is, as a sort of synecdoche, "that which is beautiful," referring to all the Forms or to Being. Knowledge of Forms as requiring the love of beautiful things only makes sense, I believe, if the Good is virtually all of these.<sup>105</sup> If this were not the case, then the achievement of the philosopher would not clearly entail the possession of good things where "possession" indicates the real good that everyone wills (βούλεσθαι).

The production of true virtue which results only from the knowledge of Being further elucidates the articulation of the system. The Good is essentially diffusive. What it produces is unqualifiedly Good-like including both the Demiurge and Being. Here there is no virtue, but only the paradigm of virtue. True virtue is what goodness looks like in the sensible,

by Vasiliou 2015. He thinks, 45–47, that it is the desire for immortality that motivates the lover to give birth to true virtue. This view seems to me to misunderstand the text at 212A2–6, where it is the knowledge of Beauty that produces true virtue. The words γενήσεται τίκτειν ("he will give birth") are taken by Vasiliou to mean "will be able to give birth" and somehow to be irrelevant to the desire for immortality. But the claim is assertoric, not conditional. The true virtue is in the philosopher and the "cultivation (θρεψαμένω)" of it will produce virtuous deeds. No further motivation is needed since producing virtuous deeds is the achievement of one's own good.

<sup>102</sup> *Symp.* 211E4–212A7. See Destrée 2017, who rightly emphasizes the moral and political transformative effect of the knowledge of Forms.

<sup>103</sup> Price 1989, 51, takes these images of virtue as "ersatz" virtue, though he goes on to describe them as in fact the popular or political virtues of *Phaedo* and *Republic*, that is, virtuous practices without philosophical underpinning.

<sup>104</sup> *Symp.* 211D1–3. <sup>105</sup> See Robin 1908, 223; Price 1989, 43; Gerson 2006, 62–64.

temporalized, and transitory world. “Illusory” or “popular or political” virtue are deviations from this.<sup>106</sup> The reason why wisdom is required to be added to the moral virtues in order to “assimilate to the divine” is clear. So, too, is the reason why “being virtuous without philosophy” in *Republic* Book 10 is as likely as not to produce dolorous results.

Beauty is a relational property of Being, specifically, the property of attracting us or stimulating our desire.<sup>107</sup> Considered as a unity along with symmetry and truth, it comprises the triad that best represents the Good.<sup>108</sup> The love of the beautiful encapsulates the reversion to the Good. Accordingly, the multiple beautiful things encapsulate the variety of manifestations of the Good.<sup>109</sup> The distinction between appearance and reality works in parallel for both: Apparent beauty stands to real beauty as apparent good stands to real good. Presumably, the prevalence of nonveridical appearances is entirely the result of embodiment. Whatever appears beautiful or good has to be scrutinized by intellect as to its *bona fides*. Integrated unity is an index of realness as opposed to mere appearance.<sup>110</sup>

Plato, I suppose, focused on the ubiquity of ἔρωσ to indicate the transcendent and ultimate power of the Idea of the Good. This ubiquity

<sup>106</sup> True virtue and popular or political virtue in relation to the paradigm of virtue in the intelligible world stand, respectively, as εἰκαστική τέχνη and φανταστική τέχνη in relation to their paradigm in *Soph.* 235D6–E2 with 236C3–4. True virtue is “symmetrical” with the intelligible world because it represents it as an integrated unity; popular or political virtue is not; it only appears to be. Being “symmetrical” with the intelligible world is the result of “assimilation to god.”

<sup>107</sup> See Ferrari 1992, 260, “the beautiful is . . . the quality by which the good shines and shows itself to us.” In Aristotle, e.g., τὸ καλὸν also has a derivative sense indicating our evaluation of an action or institution, and so on. So, at *EN* B 3, 1104b31, he says that there are three aims of choice: the noble (τὸ καλόν), the useful (τὸ συμφέρον), and the pleasurable (τὸ ἡδύ). The use of καλόν here should be situated within the dual aspect of the general meaning of φύσις as endowment and achievement. To call something καλόν is indicative of the achievement. So, for example, virtue is καλόν because it names that which fulfills our nature. See, for example, *La.* 192C–D; *Protag.* 349E; *Gorg.* 474D4. I call this sense derivative (at least for Plato) because the fulfillment of our nature is always correlated with the attainment of being, particularly, the integrative unity according to kind. See *Hip. Ma.* 295C2–3 where καλόν is defined as that which is beneficial (χρήσιμον). Here is perhaps a tertiary sense indicating that which contributes to the achievement.

<sup>108</sup> *Phil.* 65A1–5.

<sup>109</sup> McCabe 2005, 192–193, rather grudgingly admits that Plato posits a superordinate Idea of the Good but goes on to claim that its objectivity diminishes the importance of the agent. Also, see Kraut 2011, 80–81, along the same lines. See Murdoch 1970, 103, who seems to me to have a better grasp of what Plato is doing: “And when we try perfectly to love what is imperfect our love goes to its object *via* the Good to be thus purified and made unselfish and just.” Also, see Kronqvist 2019, especially 991, for some penetrating remarks on how the apex of philosophical achievement does not involve the transcending of the personal, but rather its transformation in the light of the Good.

<sup>110</sup> Most evident in Aristophanes’ myth in *Symp.* 189D2–193C5. The speeches of Phaedrus, Pausanias, and Eryximachus, and the dialectical interchange with Agathon all in their own ways cast light on the fundamental themes of true versus defective virtue and integrative unity. For example, the speech of Eryximachus at 186B–C invokes the universality of ἔρωσ, even including plants. The nature of ἔρωσ as desire for the Good is then explained by Diotima. See Kronqvist 2019, 979–986.



is the best way of acknowledging that the universal desire for the Good must originate in it. Plato saw that the immediate object of ἔρωσ, the beautiful, is a manifestation of the Good, whether real or apparent. If beauty is a relational property of Being, it follows that love of the beautiful is nothing but the desire for Being, which in turn is, in the consummation of love, just how the desire for the real Good is satisfied. If someone confines himself to the merely apparently beautiful (that is, the nonveridical appearance), none of these facts change. But in that case, it is not possible or perhaps just not likely for someone to grasp that “good is one,” that one’s good is not a goal in a zero-sum game. The charge that, in the higher mysteries of *Symposium*, the philosopher transcends that the personal is not a charge entirely without merit, though it is ultimately misplaced. For transcending the idiosyncratic personhood of the other is no more necessary than is transcending one’s own idiosyncratic personhood, supposedly constituted by idiosyncratic and incommensurable goods. The one who wonders whether the good that is virtue is beneficial or more beneficial than any other good is assuming that the criterion for an answer to this question is personal advantage. One who is no longer tempted to think that personal advantage can be achieved despite the advantage of anyone else has transformed the personal and thereby achieved real happiness.

### 2.7 The Idea of the Good and to *philon*

Plato’s dialogue *Lysis*, devoted to the theme of friendship (φιλία), can be read as a companion to *Symposium*.<sup>111</sup> It introduces φιλία into the structure of moral realism just as *Symposium* introduces ἔρωσ.<sup>112</sup> One well-trodden path used in explaining how this is done focuses on an important passage near the end of the dialogue, in which the idea of a πρῶτον φίλον (“primary friend”) is introduced.<sup>113</sup> According to this approach, the

<sup>111</sup> By “companion” I mean that neither dialogue negates nor corrects anything in the other. See Thesleff 2009, 296–297, who concludes that “the various allusions in *Lysis* can be read as implying those of the *Symposium*.”

<sup>112</sup> See *Lys.* 221B7, which seems to treat φιλία and ἔρωσ as overlapping, if not synonymous. This closeness in meaning is even more explicit at 5221E3–6, where ἔρωσ, φιλία, and ἐπιθυμία are said to be of what is οἰκεῖον to us, that is, what belongs to our natures. Undoubtedly ἔρωσ has a sexual connotation that φιλία does not necessarily have. And yet, embedding ἔρωσ in a metaphysical framework has a “desexualizing” effect that makes it even closer to φιλία. Other terms used as practically synonymous with φιλεῖν are ἀσπάρεσθαί (217B4), ἄγαπαν (222D2), and προτιμᾶν (219D7).

<sup>113</sup> The term φίλον is highly resistant to English translation. “Dear” is tepid; “friend” is too limited. I am going to leave it untranslated, noting only that it refers to any object of φιλία, one type of

πρῶτον φίλον is a reference to the Idea of the Good.<sup>114</sup> This view is sometimes misrepresented as holding that Plato hereby introduces Forms into his discussion of φιλία, not a Form of Friendship, but a Form of the Good or perhaps a Form of Beauty.<sup>115</sup> As argued above in Section 2.2, Plato distinguishes a superordinate Idea of the Good from a generic Form of the Good. And as I shall try to show now, and in the light of *Symposium*, we should insist on the likelihood that the πρῶτον φίλον refers to the former and not the latter. Here is the relevant passage:

Medicine, we say, is φίλον for the sake of health – Yes – then, is health also φίλον? – Indeed, it is – Therefore, if it is φίλον, it is for the sake of something – Yes – For the sake of something φίλον if we are to follow our previous agreement – Indeed, it is – Then is not that for the sake of which it is φίλον also φίλον? – Yes – Then aren't we either going to have to give up going on like this or else get to some starting-point (ἀρχήν) which does not carry us on to another φίλον, for the sake of which all the others are said to be φίλον, but to a first φίλον for the sake of which all the others are said to be φίλον? – Necessarily – This is in fact what I am talking about, lest all the other things which we said to be φίλον for the sake of that deceive us, as some kinds of images of that first, which is truly φίλον.<sup>116</sup>

Clearly, the issue here is the identity of the πρῶτον φίλον.<sup>117</sup> Perhaps the most obvious answer to this question is: the person who is dear or φίλον,

human desire which is not necessarily sexual or appetitive and whose various manifestations are an indication of the ubiquity of the Good in all types of being and our natural affinity for it.

<sup>114</sup> See, for example, Krämer 1959, 499–501; Szlezák 1985, 117–126; Reale 1997, 277–283.

<sup>115</sup> See Vlastos 1973, “The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato,” appendix 1, 35–37, in which Vlastos argues that there is no textual basis for assuming transcendent Forms to be present in *Lysis*.

<sup>116</sup> *Lys.* 219C1–D5: ἰατρική, φαμέν, ἕνεκα τῆς ὑγιείας φίλον. {–} Ναί. {–} Οὐκοῦν καὶ ἡ ὑγίεια φίλον; {–} Πάνυ γε. {–} Εἰ ἄρα φίλον, ἕνεκά του. {–} Ναί. {–} Φίλου γέ τινος δῆ, εἴπερ ἀκολουθήσει τῇ πρόσθεν ὁμολογίᾳ. {–} Πάνυ γε. {–} Οὐκοῦν καὶ ἐκεῖνο φίλον αὐ ἔσται ἕνεκα φίλου; {–} Ναί. {–} Ἄρ' οὐν οὐκ ἀνάγκη ἀπειπεῖν ἡμᾶς οὕτως ἰόντας ἢ ἀφικέσθαι ἐπὶ τινα ἀρχήν, ἢ οὐκέτ' ἐπανοίσει ἐπ' ἄλλο φίλον, ἀλλ' ἦξει ἐπ' ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἐστὶν πρῶτον φίλον, οὐ ἕνεκα καὶ τὰ ἄλλα φαμέν πάντα φίλα εἶναι; {–} Ἀνάγκη; {–} Τοῦτο δῆ ἐστὶν ὃ λέγω, μὴ ἡμᾶς τάλλα πάντα ἃ εἵπομεν ἐκείνου ἕνεκα φίλα εἶναι, ὥσπερ εἶδωλα ἅττα ὄντα αὐτοῦ, ἕξαπατᾶ, ἢ δ' ἐκεῖνο τὸ πρῶτον, ὃ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐστὶ φίλον. See McTighe 1983, 76–79, for the slight textual difficulty in this passage and for the solution which I have followed. But the principal point is unchanged, namely, the identification of the πρῶτον φίλον with an ἀρχή of some sort. Cf. *Gorg.* 467C–468E for the basic logic of the argument: People only want specific means to ends because they want the ends themselves. If there were no ends, but only putative means, there could not then be means to ends. This is why Aristotle says that choice is *always* of means to ends; ends themselves are not chosen. They are given, principally by our natures. See *EN* Γ 5, 1122b11–12, b32–34, 7.1133b3–4. Price 1989, 8, takes the πρῶτον φίλον to be happiness, though he adds in a note, “Plato tends to count as truly ‘good’ not *eudaimonia* itself but what reliably yields or produces it.” As *Symposium* says, happiness is the *possession* of the Good.

<sup>117</sup> See Kahn 1996, 266, “No reader who comes to the *Lysis* without knowledge of the doctrine expounded in the *Symposium* could understand what is implied by ‘the primary dear, for the sake of which everything else is dear.’” And, 267, “the *Lysis* points the way not only to the Beautiful itself in the *Symposium*, but also to the Form of the Good in the *Republic*.”

not for utilitarian reasons, but for “his own sake.” The most well-known proponent of this view is Gregory Vlastos, who argued that “loving someone for his own sake” means to love them without regard for one’s own sake.<sup>118</sup> As I have already argued in this chapter, the dichotomy between “for another’s sake” or “for one’s own sake” is undercut by the identification of the Good and one’s own good, meaning *not* that the Good just is my own good or your own good distributively, but that their identity guarantees that it is not possible that my own good should be achieved at your expense. If that is so, then it is pointless to contrast altruism with egotism. Your good is never betrayed as I successfully seek my own, nor is my good betrayed when you are seeking yours. Needless to say, this claim applies *only* to the real good. Obviously, it frequently *appears* to one that one’s own good is at odds with the good of another, even if this cannot possibly be so.<sup>119</sup>

It might be objected that the universality of the Good thus understood does not in fact efface the contrast between egotism and altruism. On the contrary, it is possible to be selfish and to be unselfish. These are real motives for action. Plato’s moral realism does not deny this. Every ostensibly selfish or altruistic act appears to the agent to be a manifestation of the Good that she seeks. If that act turns out in fact to be good, then it is good for the agent and for everyone else that it is good for the agent. The implication of Plato’s position is that describing an act merely as egotistic or altruistic does not give us enough information to be able to determine whether the appearance of good in this case (to the agent) is veridical or nonveridical. People certainly do act selflessly and selfishly. But in each case, the act takes its characterization from the rational desire or intention of the agent. Among other things, the metaphysical foundation of ethics undercuts the assumption that such desires or intentions are dispositive with regard to the question of the instantiation of the Good.

<sup>118</sup> See Vlastos 1973, “The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato,” who claims that the *πρῶτον φίλον* *should be* a person who is loved for his or her own sake, though Socrates does not spell this out. In fact, 30, what Socrates pursues is “spiritualized egocentrism.” We need to recall that Vlastos thinks that *Lysis* is among the so-called Socratic dialogues in which Socratic philosophy is expressed. When Plato begins to express his own philosophy in the so-called middle dialogues (along with the so-called transitional dialogues), he resolutely rejects any thoughts or altruism in loving or friendship, making it completely self-related. In the *Lysis* passage, Vlastos appeals to *Symposium* to understand the “images” of *φιλία* as analogous to “images of virtue” in *Symposium*. A true *φίλον* would be analogous to the true virtue of the successful philosopher. See Kosman 1976 for a perceptive response to Vlastos’s criticism of Plato’s “egocentric” conception of love.

<sup>119</sup> See *Lg.* 5.731D6–732B4 where Plato claims that “excessive self-love (τὴν σφόδρα ἑαυτοῦ φιλίαν) is the greatest cause of human evils because this self-love “leads us to think that we should always honor our own self more than the truth (τὸ αὐτοῦ πρὸ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἀεὶ τιμᾶν δεῖ ἡγούμενος).”

A different proposal is advanced by Terry Penner and Christopher Rowe, who argue that the *πρῶτον φίλον* is knowledge, that is, knowledge of whatever it is that would produce my maximal happiness at this moment and under these circumstances.<sup>120</sup> Without wishing to discount the importance that Socrates places on knowledge, it seems far-fetched, to say the least, to focus on knowledge as the *πρῶτον φίλον* as opposed to what knowledge is supposed to be of. If that is so, “whatever maximized my happiness” would be the *πρῶτον φίλον*. But this result faces a problem alluded to earlier, namely, that it does not exclude the possibility that my happiness should be achieved at your expense. If, however, it is stipulated that it does exclude this possibility, then this would be because my happiness and your happiness are the same thing, not numerically, of course, but in principle. My argument has been that the only way this could be so – apart from sheer unaccountable luck – is if the Good is uniquely beyond οὐσία. *That* surely is the *πρῶτον φίλον*, knowledge of which is, as *Republic* makes explicit, and *Symposium* supports, what produces true virtue in everyone and anyone.<sup>121</sup>

In *Lysis*, ἐπιθυμία of what we lack is the cause of φιλία; in *Symposium*, ἐπιθυμία of what we lack is the cause of ἔρωσ.<sup>122</sup> And what we lack and so desire is, nevertheless, οἰκεῖον to us.<sup>123</sup> Further, our desire for the Good is desire for it as beautiful (καλόν).<sup>124</sup> Penner and Rowe are right to recognize that knowledge is the achievement of what is οἰκεῖον to us. And they are also right to emphasize the importance of being able to apply this knowledge to our own lives. But the Good is not the knowledge; rather, it is what the knowledge is of. And this Good is a metaphysical principle, not its contingent instantiation. Indeed, without the metaphysical principle, there could be no instantiation of it at all.

<sup>120</sup> See Penner and Rowe 2005, 273–278. For a similar interpretation see Vlastos 1991, 117, n.49; Irwin 1995, 54.

<sup>121</sup> See *Lys.* 220B7: ἀλλ’ ἄρα τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐστὶν φίλον; “Ἐμοίγε δοκεῖ (Is then the Good φίλον? It seems to me to be so). Penner and Rowe 2005, 278–279, seem to acknowledge this claim when they concede that the *πρῶτον φίλον* could be reasonably identified with the *Form* of the Good, so long as that was understood to be the Form of One’s Own Happiness. But if the Idea of the Good is meant, I do not see how it could be identical with my own happiness unless it was also identical with your own happiness, too. As Penner and Rowe insist, anyone’s happiness is entirely circumstantial, and since circumstances differ, it is very difficult to see how my happiness and your happiness cannot ever conflict on their account of what the Idea of the Good is. The only motivation I can discern for this interpretation of the Idea of the Good is that it is required by the prudentialist principle.

<sup>122</sup> See *Lys.* 221D3; *Symp.* 207D1–3. See Robin 1908, 48–49, on the many striking parallels between *Lysis* and *Symposium*.

<sup>123</sup> See *Lys.* 222C3; *Symp.* 205E6–7. <sup>124</sup> See *Lys.* 216D2; *Symp.* 204E1–2.

The last line of our passage makes the important point that the things that we think are φίλον because they are instrumental to the πρώτον φίλον would only be deceptive images if there were no first. In other words, something derives its character of being φίλον from the first. Why, though, would we ever be in danger of being deceived by things that are φίλον but not the first? Within the metaphysical framework already adduced, there is a readily intelligible answer to this question. It is that if you do not grasp anything supposedly φίλον as related to the first, then you are likely to be deceived by it because the features of it that you identify as making it φίλον are in fact misidentified or misleading. If, to recur to *Symposium* once again, you identify beauty with certain physical features, the deception would be in thinking that something without those features could not be beautiful. This does not mean that the thing deemed beautiful is not so; it means only that unless you see it as an instance of the Form of Beauty, you will be misled – perhaps disastrously misled – in how you respond to that. So, unless you acknowledge the πρώτον φίλον, and therefore, that every other thing said to be φίλον is δεύτερον (secondarily) φίλον and φίλον at all only because it participates in the first, you are likely to be deceived.<sup>125</sup>

In *Republic*, philosophers are distinguished from “lovers of sights and sounds” not by their knowledge – after all, they are seeking knowledge, not proud possessors of it – but by the fact that they understand that knowledge has as objects the intelligible world of which the sensible world is only an image.<sup>126</sup> Philosophers do not mistake the sensible world for the really real world. What this means in practice is that they will not misconstrue images of the real for the real itself; they will not take the “material” out of which the images are constructed as constitutive of the essential structure of the real. The false dialectic of the nonphilosopher is even more vividly at play when a secondary φίλον is mistaken for a primary one. The mistake consists in a doomed exploration of what exactly it is that makes the φίλον so. It is doomed because it presumes to find the answer in, as Vlastos puts it, “the individual as love object.” The idiosyncratic attributes of the individual are not illusory or even insignificant. After all, even the apparently beautiful attracts us to the Good. But these idiosyncratic attributes

<sup>125</sup> Vlastos 1973, “The Individual as Object of Love in Plato,” appendix 1, 37, denies that the images in this passage need to be interpreted within a metaphysical framework. Vlastos rejects the comparison with *Symposium* for obscure reasons. He says that the true virtue of the philosopher as a result of knowledge of the Forms is only “true” virtue as compared with virtues that are not genuine. This is hard to construe since it is certainly not the case that instances of the Form of Beauty are not true instances of it, though as we learn from *Republic*, they are sensible images.

<sup>126</sup> See *Rep.* 5.476A10–D5.

cannot amount to what the *πρῶτον φίλον* is. Loving persons as individuals or “for themselves” is no more excluded from the moral realism developed here than is altruism. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental divide between the love of persons as a function of the love of the *πρῶτον φίλον* and the love of persons as a *substitute* for that.

The dialogue *Lysis*, whatever its compositional place is in relation to *Symposium* and *Republic*, provides a revealing, albeit limited, account of the logic of transcendence. All desire aims at a goal or *τέλος*, that which satisfies the desire. The goal is either the *πρῶτον φίλον* or it is not, in which case it is a means to the *πρῶτον φίλον*. How are we to tell whether something is just *φίλον* because it is a means to the *πρῶτον φίλον* or whether it is itself the *πρῶτον φίλον*? The criterion provided in the above text is whether we can or cannot say of it “on account of something else (*ἐνεκά του*).” If we can, it is not the *πρῶτον φίλον*; if we cannot, it is. The Good is clearly *φίλον* in the latter sense. The manifestation of the Good in my case is my happiness, just as the manifestation of the Good in your case is your happiness. But if your happiness is subordinated to mine, then your happiness becomes only instrumentally *φίλον* to me; it is no longer a manifestation of the *πρῶτον φίλον*. In principle, this is perhaps the way the world works sometimes. It is surely not the way Plato thinks the world works. For the manifestation of the Good in A – let us call it *x* – is distinguishable from the material out of which *x* is constructed, just as Helen’s beauty is distinguishable from her flesh and bones.<sup>127</sup> So, if the Good is manifested in how A acts in relation to B, though the *λόγος* of A’s acting is different from the *λόγος* of B’s being acted upon, if A’s acting in relation to B is a manifestation of the Good for A, then there is no logical space for its being other than a manifestation of the Good for B. That impossibility would not be like a case of Helen’s flesh and bones being ugly in different circumstances or in comparison to Aphrodite. What makes something a manifestation of the Good is always distinct from the agential circumstances and peculiarities of the agent, even though the Good cannot be manifested in us other than through our agential circumstances and peculiarities.

The result is that the *πρῶτον φίλον* must be over and above any manifestation of it. But unlike, say, the Form of Justice, it cannot have any essentialistic content. For on the assumption that it had such a content,

<sup>127</sup> In *Republic* 1.331C–D, the justice in an act of returning someone’s property to someone is distinct from the physical act of returning the property. This is demonstrated by showing that the identical physical act of returning someone’s property can be in other circumstances unjust.

one could always ask whether that content is good, that is, if the presence of that content is just φίλον “on account of something else” or the πρώτον φίλον. If the prudentialist wants to maintain that a just act is the πρώτον φίλον because it is constitutive of one’s happiness, then that act could never be inimical to the happiness of someone else even if that person were indifferent to it. But for all we know, the same could be said for an unjust act when performed by the aspiring tyrant. The only way to short-circuit the realization of this possibility is if the πρώτον φίλον is super-essentialistic. My happiness manifests the Good if and only if that manifestation cannot simultaneously negate the manifestation in another.

## 2.8 The Idea of the Good and the One

My principal concern in this section is answering the question, “what does the testimony according to which Plato identified the Idea of the Good with the One contribute to our understanding of Plato’s moral theory?” Those who insist that the answer to this question is “nothing,” seem to me to have an exceedingly weak case. Those who hold this view are inexorably led to say that the superordinate absolutely simple unhypothetical first principle of all has no relevance to Plato’s moral theory because they cannot conceive of how the Good could provide knowability to the Forms, much less be the explanation for their existence and essence. They have no way of explaining how the Good makes Forms useful and beneficial.<sup>128</sup> By contrast, the recognition of the identification of the Good with the One by Plato does give us a powerful and comprehensive way of untying all these knots.<sup>129</sup> Finally, it should be emphasized that this

<sup>128</sup> Penner is an exception because he identifies the Idea of the Good with the Form of Advantage or Usefulness. The implausibility of this has been addressed above. See Krämer 1959, 487–551, for the seminal analysis of how the Good becomes identified with the One as the result of Plato’s encounters with his Presocratic predecessors, especially Parmenides. I would add to this Plato’s early encounter with Pythagoreans in Southern Italy.

<sup>129</sup> See Krämer 1959, 135, on the requirement that a principle of order, understood as integrative unity, be the One, and not simply the Good; Szlezák 2003, 109–131; Halfwassen 2015, 96–100. See also, for example, Murdoch 1970, 94–95, on the Good as a principle of unity and order in the moral life; Burnyeat 2000, 76–77, on the centrality of unity, as a principle of mathematics, for Plato’s ethics and politics. Burnyeat assumes that this unity is identical with the Good. Burnyeat, however, does not clearly reject the unsupportable idea that the Good is the Form of Unity or Oneness. Brodie 2021, 176–195, raises some penetrating objections to the arguments of Burnyeat and others that the results of mathematical training is actually constitutive of dialectic. These objections are based on her diffidence in regard to the identification of the Good with the One. Lavecchia 2010 argues for a distinction between Good and One, wherein the latter (along with the Indefinite Dyad) are subordinated to the former. In effect, the One is identified with the One-Being of the second hypothesis of the second part of *Parmenides* (142Bff).

identification has considerable support from the dialogues, apart from the testimony of Aristotle and the indirect tradition.<sup>130</sup>

In chapter 6 of Book A of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle moves from a survey of Pre-Socratic philosophers to Plato, whose “treatment (πραγματεία)” of ultimate causes is a centerpiece of Aristotle’s dialectical history.<sup>131</sup> Aristotle begins by distinguishing the ethical philosophy of the historical Socrates from the metaphysics of Plato, which begins with the positing of separate Forms as the objects of knowledge. He adds that in addition to Forms and sensibles, Plato posited Mathematical Objects, which are “intermediary” between the two.<sup>132</sup> He then reports:

Since the Forms are the causes of other things, he thought that the elements of Forms are the elements of all things. As matter, the Great and the Small are the principles; as essence, it is the One. For from the Great and the Small and by participation in the One come the Forms and these are Numbers. In saying that the One is essence and not another thing that is said to be one, he spoke like the Pythagoreans, and also like them in saying that Numbers are causes of the essence of other things.<sup>133</sup>

The evidence that Plato did indeed identify Forms with Numbers in some sense is extensive.<sup>134</sup> Aristotle does not introduce this identification as a late “development” in Plato’s thinking; indeed, Aristotle throughout the corpus and the scores of references to Plato’s philosophy never even suggests that that philosophy is not a unified system. The reduction of

<sup>130</sup> At *Rep.* 6.506D7–E1, Socrates declines to discuss the essence of the Good (τί ποτ’ ἐστὶ τὰγαθόν). The direct and indirect tradition is unanimous in reporting that the essence of the Good is found in the One itself (αὐτὸ τὸ ἓν).

<sup>131</sup> See esp. Miller 1995 on *Parmenides* as a major source of this testimony.

<sup>132</sup> *Meta.* A 6, 987a14–18. See also B 1, 995b15ff; Z 2, 1028b19–21; K 1, 1059b2; Λ 1, 1069a33ff; M 1, 1076a19ff; 9, 1086a11–13; N 3, 1090b35–36.

<sup>133</sup> *Meta.* A 6, 987b18–25: ἐπεὶ δ’ αἴτια τὰ εἶδη τοῖς ἄλλοις, τὰ κείνων στοιχεῖα πάντων ᾗθη τῶν ὄντων εἶναι στοιχεῖα. ὡς μὲν οὖν ὕλην τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρόν εἶναι ἀρχάς, ὡς δ’ οὐσίαν τὸ ἓν· ἐξ ἐκείνων γὰρ κατὰ μέθεξιν τοῦ ἑνὸς τὰ εἶδη εἶναι τοὺς ἀριθμούς. τὸ μόντοι γε ἓν οὐσίαν εἶναι, καὶ μὴ ἕτερόν γέ τι ὄν λέγεσθαι ἓν, παραπλησίως τοῖς Πυθαγορείοις ἔλεγε, καὶ τὸ τοὺς ἀριθμούς αἰτίους εἶναι τοῖς ἄλλοις τῆς οὐσίας ὡσαύτως ἐκείνοις. Ross 1924 *ad loc.*, argues for omitting τὰ εἶδη. Jaeger 1957 and others, including Primavesi 2012, omit τοὺς ἀριθμούς. Bertl 2017, retains both. Neither omission is found in the mss. Steel 2012, 186–188, argues that neither omission is desirable or necessary.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. A8, 990a29–32.; Z 7, 1036b13–25; Λ 8, 1073a18–19; M 6, 1080b11–14; M 7, 1081a5–7; M 8, 1083a18; M 8, 1084a7–8; M 9, 1086a11–13; N 2, 1090a4–6; N 3, 1090a16. M 4, 1078 b9–12 is especially important because it makes a clear distinction between an early (ἐξ ἀρχῆς) phase of the theory of Forms and then a subsequent reduction of Forms to Numbers. There is, however, no indication by Aristotle of when in Plato’s career this reduction occurred. For this reason, it is left to students of Plato to discover indications of the reduction in the dialogues. See Gerson 2013, ch. 4, where this evidence is discussed at greater length. Also, see Richard 2005, 211–218; Krämer 2014 [1969], 206–207.



Forms to Numbers is not presented as a development but rather as an integral part of Plato's causal analysis.

The testimony continues:

It is evident from what has been said that he [Plato] uses only two causes, the cause of the whatness and the cause according to matter (for the Forms are cause of the whatness of the other things, and the cause of the whatness of the Forms is the One). It is also evident what the underlying matter is, in virtue of which the Forms are predicated of the sensible things, and the One is predicated of the Forms; this is the Dyad, or the Great and the Small.<sup>135</sup>

So, Aristotle's testimony is that the ultimate principles of Plato's philosophy are the One and the Indefinite Dyad. It is not unreasonable to infer that this One must be another name for the first principle of all, the Idea of the Good. This inference is supported by the following passage:

Among those who posit immovable substances, some say that the One itself is the Good itself; at least they thought the essence of the Good to be, most of all, the One.<sup>136</sup>

A number of features in the above report deserve attention. First is the claim that Plato viewed Forms as having elements.<sup>137</sup> Second is that these elements are the One and the Great and Small, also called "the Indefinite Dyad (ἀόριστος δυάς)" as the next passage indicates.<sup>138</sup> The third feature of the above account is Aristotle's expression of the two principles as matter

<sup>135</sup> *Meta.* A 6, 988a8–14: φανερόν δ' ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ὅτι δυοῖν αἰτίαι μόνον κέχρηται, τῇ τε τοῦ τί ἐστι καὶ τῇ κατὰ τὴν ὕλην (τὰ γὰρ εἶδη τοῦ τί ἐστιν αἰτία τοῖς ἄλλοις, τοῖς δ' εἶδеси τὸ ἐν), καὶ τῆς ἢ ὕλης ἢ ὑποκειμένη καθ' ἣς τὰ εἶδη μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν τὸ δ' ἐν ἐν τοῖς εἶδеси λέγεται, ὅτι αὐτὴ δυάς ἐστι, τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρόν.

<sup>136</sup> *Meta.* N 4, 1091b13–15: τῶν δὲ τὰς ἀκινήτους οὐσίας εἶναι λεγόντων οἱ μὲν φασιν αὐτὸ τὸ ἐν τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτὸ εἶναι. οὐσίαν μέντοι τὸ ἐν αὐτοῦ ᾧοντο εἶναι μάλιστα. A bit further on, 22–25, Aristotle contrasts this position with that of Plato's successor as head of the Academy, Speusippus, who, owing to problems with the identification of Good and One, abandoned this, claiming that good arises from the One; it is not identical with it. The contrast seems to support the surmise that Plato (among others) is the one who is referred to in this passage as holding the identity of Good and One. Cf. also *EE* A 8, 1218a15–32, which refers to those who hold that τὸ ἐν is αὐτὸ τὰγαθόν. See Brunschwig 1971 for a comprehensive argument that this crucial *EE* passage is focused on the metaphysics of Plato, not that of Pythagoras or Xenocrates. Also, Krämer 2014, 262–264.

<sup>137</sup> The "elements" of Forms cannot be the superordinate One and the Indefinite Dyad but must be the One of *Parmenides* 2nd hypothesis (H2) and the Indefinite Dyad. The superordinate One is above elemental status. Aristotle, *Meta.* Δ 3, 1014a26–27, says that an element is that out of which a thing is composed. But this is distinct from an ἀρχή or principle. See I, 1013a7–8. An element is an internal constituent; a principle is not that, but rather external to the elements and their composition.

<sup>138</sup> See *Meta.* N 7, 1081a22, and so on, where whoever is the subject of Aristotle's criticism, it is clear that "Dyad" is a shortened form of "Indefinite Dyad." At A 6, 987b25–6, Aristotle says that Plato differed from the Pythagoreans in making the Indefinite a duality. See *Phil.* 16C1–17A5, 23C–27C on the Unlimited and the Limit.

and essence or form. We must assume that Aristotle knew that the Idea of the Good is specifically said by Plato to be beyond essence. If the Good is the One, in what sense is it the essence in relation to matter? The explicit use of Aristotle's own terminology to explain Plato's position both raises a question about the accuracy of the testimony and about Plato's view regarding the relation of the two principles.

My suggestions for an answer to these questions are, briefly, this. Plato posits the Good and the Indefinite Dyad, later to be reflected in the distinction between Limit and Unlimited in *Philebus*, as the principles of a sort of Platonic hylomorphism.<sup>139</sup> Plato's version is to be distinguished from Aristotle's by the fact that while Aristotle affirms, Plato denies that the essence of a substance is identical with that substance. The One is not the essence of any kind of thing because the One is beyond essence. But it is the principle of essence for the nature of anything.<sup>140</sup> An analogous remark can be made for the Indefinite Dyad. The One or Good is certainly not the essence of oneness; rather, things are or belong to one kind rather than another because of the One. The principle of unity or oneness is not one. But without being one, nothing exists as the one thing it is. So, if we can make sense of how the One serves as a principle of Forms, and so indirectly of everything else, we have no reason to deny the accuracy of Aristotle's testimony.

The identification of the Good with the One is also supported by a fragment from a student of Aristotle, Aristoxenus, in his *Elementa Harmonica* in which he says that in a public lecture *On the Good*, Plato defied the expectations of his audience and instead of talking about traditional human goods such as wealth, health, and strength, he discoursed on mathematics, culminating in the claim that Good is one.<sup>141</sup> These words are most naturally taken to indicate the uniqueness of the

<sup>139</sup> The irreducible compositeness of everything but the One follows from the unique absolute simplicity of the latter. If the Good/One were a Form, it would be composite like all the Forms. See *Parm.* 142B5–6.

<sup>140</sup> See Krämer 1959, 135, 474ff, 535–551, who presents the most forceful step-by-step account of why the superordinate Idea of the Good must be identified with the absolutely simple One, linking virtue as order (τάξις) or integrative unity according to kind with unqualified unity as the ultimate principle of order.

<sup>141</sup> Aristoxenus, *Harm. Elem.* 2.30–31 (= *De bono*, p.111 Ross). Brisson 2018 tries to deflate the value of this testimony. The words ὅτι ἀγαθὸν ἔστιν ἓν (that good is one) (without the definite articles) can certainly be understood in the anodyne sense according to which Plato is reported to have said that good is one as opposed to being many or diverse, as most people think. Plato does of course believe that. But these words conclude the account of what Plato talked about, namely, mathematics and astronomy, with the conclusion that “good is one.” This brings to mind the education curriculum of Plato's rulers, culminating in their vision of the Good. But “good is one” would be a rather odd way to describe this conclusion. Given Aristotle's own testimony, it seems more reasonable that

Good, so to speak. “Good is one” means that Good is not one *and* many, as the Forms are said to be. None of the things that manifest the Good thereby “pluralize” it.

The glaring problem in understanding this testimony is not the identification of the Good with the One, but with the postulation of the Indefinite Dyad as a supposedly coordinate principle.<sup>142</sup> If the Good/One and the Indefinite Dyad are distinct principles on the identical ontological level, then each must possess sufficient complexity to be distinct from the other. But then the absolute simplicity of the first principle of all is destroyed along with the rationale for positing such a principle in the first place.<sup>143</sup> The interpretive and philosophical choices seem to be either somehow to subordinate the Indefinite Dyad to the Good/One or else to subordinate both the Indefinite Dyad and the Good/One as coordinate principles of the Form Numbers to another superordinate Good/One. In the latter case, we can maintain the interpretation of the first hypothesis (H1) of the second part of *Parmenides* as referring to a remote, uncognizable first principle and the second hypothesis (H2) as referring to the One-Being and its coordinate Indefinite Dyad.

The path to a solution to this problem should begin with a recognition that the Indefinite Dyad has its own sort of unity. It has a unity which nevertheless entails complexity of some sort since the One is uniquely simple. And it is the One’s simplicity that entails its absolute priority. Accordingly, the Indefinite Dyad cannot be really coordinated with the

Aristoxenus is reporting that. It should be noted that Aristoxenus says specifically that he got his information from Aristotle. A passage in *Magna Moralia* should also be considered here, even if this work is not genuine. See A 1, 1182a27–30: τὴν γὰρ ἀρετὴν κατέμειξεν εἰς τὴν πραγματείαν τὴν ὑπὲρ τὰγαθοῦ, οὐ δὴ ὀρθῶς· οὐ γὰρ οἰκεῖον (for he incorrectly mixed in virtue with the treatment of the Good, for that is inappropriate). This πραγματεία would seem to be a reference to a technical lecture on the Good such as the one Aristoxenus mentions; otherwise, it would be bizarre for Aristotle – or the author of this work, if a student of Aristotle – to criticize Plato for connecting the study of good with virtue. This is confirmed by the next line: ὑπὲρ γὰρ τῶν ὄντων καὶ ἀληθείας λέγοντα οὐκ ἔδει ὑπὲρ ἀρετῆς φράζειν· οὐδὲν γὰρ τούτῳ κάκεινῳ κοινόν (for when speaking about beings and truth, he should not have spoken about virtue, for the two have nothing in common). It should be added that Simplicius, *In Phys.* 151, 6–19; 453, 22–30; 545, 23–25 Diels, who endorses the identification of Good and One, cites three distinct accounts of Plato’s lecture or lectures by Aristotle, Speusippus, and Xenocrates. See Berti 2004, 38, for a similar argument.

<sup>142</sup> See Gaiser 1963, 12–13, on the centrality of this problem for understanding Plato’s doctrine of principles and Halfwassen 2015, 109–131, 151–155, for its most plausible resolution. See also Lavecchia 2010, ch. 3, whose elegant solution identifies the One-Being of the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* as the locus of the One and Indefinite Dyad, with the Good transcending that. He calls the Good a “*Metaprincipio*.”

<sup>143</sup> See Plato, *Parm.* 140A1–3: ἀλλὰ μὴν εἴ τι πρόπονθε χωρὶς τοῦ ἕν εἶναι τὸ ἕν, πλείω ἂν εἶναι πεπρόνθοι ἢ ἕν, τοῦτο δὲ ἀδύνατον (if, however, the One has any property apart from being one, it would have the property of being more than one, but this is impossible). This consequence also follows if the One is one where “one” is a predicate.

primary One.<sup>144</sup> The Indefinite Dyad *is* a coordinate principle of One-Being, but the first principle of all is beyond Being. Undoubtedly, this alternative involves its own severe problems.<sup>145</sup>

Why, though, is the Indefinite Dyad a principle at all? The simple answer is that the Indefinite Dyad is the principle of πλῆθος or magnitude or size, which includes both continuous and discrete quantities.<sup>146</sup> With the principle of number alone, there could be no lines or planes or solid figures.<sup>147</sup> So, the apparent paradox facing Plato is this: If everything is generated from the One, then so is the Indefinite Dyad. But magnitude cannot be generated from the One. For example, a line is not generated from a point or an aggregation of points. The paradox is mitigated to a certain extent by the fact that One-Being is not number, but the principle of number, in which case number is generated from One-Being as much as is magnitude. This is why number and magnitude are both generated in H<sub>2</sub> of *Parmenides*. They are coordinate principles of One-Being. It is simply not the case that the Indefinite Dyad is coordinate with the One, first principle of all. The general idea, I think, is that generation of Numbers up to the generation of three-dimensional volumes may be conceived of as a geometrical construction eternally carried out and eternally completed by a divine intellect, that is, the Demiurge. Plato does not

<sup>144</sup> See Aristotle, *Meta.* N 1, 1087b9–12, who says that the Great and Small is one, although the proponents of the principle do not say if it is one in number or in λόγος, too. Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *MX*, 261; Simplicius, *In Phys.* 454, 8–9. See Halfwassen 1997 on the combined monism and dualism of principles in *Parmenides*. This is, 16, “a monism in the reduction to an absolute with a dualism in the deduction of being.” That is, a dualism subordinate to the primary monism. There is dualism *within* being and monism in the explanation for the generation of being. This dualism is the basis for Plato’s hylomorphism, the combination of Limit and Unlimited.

<sup>145</sup> Already Aristotle, *Meta.* Λ 10, 1075b18–20, notes that those who posit Forms need a superordinate principle as cause of participation by sensibles in Forms. This causal role, however, does not seem to be easily assumed by an absolutely simple first principle.

<sup>146</sup> Thus, πλῆθος can refer to a plurality of units or “ones.” See *Parm.* 132B2, 144A6, 151D3; *Phil.* 16D7. But it can also refer to a continuous quantity. See *Parm.* 158C4; *Phil.* 29C2. In the latter sense, πλῆθος is used synonymously with τὸ ἔπειρον. See 26C6. Also, it can be used synonymously with μέγεθος. See *Parm.* 149C5, 150B8. This is quantity or extension apart from number.

<sup>147</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *M. X*, 281–283, describes two ways in which the generation of bodies from numbers was thought to occur by different Pythagoreans (including Plato). The first mentioned describes the generation of bodies from numbers via the usual dimensional levels using the verb ρεῖν (to flow) which, it will be recalled, is the root verb used for the Good in its activity of “overflowing.” It is hardly surprising that if like produces like, the mode of production will be like in all cases. How, say, a line “flows” from a point (or an indivisible line, as Aristotle explains, *Meta.* A 9, 992a20–22, M 8, 1084a37–b2) is a special case of how a many is derived from a one. That is, the reduction of bodies to numbers is the epistemological inverse of the generation of bodies from numbers. Everything that exists along this line of reduction/generation is ultimately accounted for by the unlimited fecundity of the first principle of all. The proof of the unlimited fecundity is just the existence of bodies. See Richard 2005, 190–205, for some helpful remarks about the complexities, and pros and cons, of the various accounts of generation from the first principle.

have to worry about how lines are composed out of points; rather, lines are constructed from a starting-point in thought, planes from a given line, and so on. The ontological hierarchy is manifested by constructive mathematical analysis. The generation of bodies in time is that of an image of this mathematical order. Without the Indefinite Dyad, not only could bodies not exist, but not even their paradigmatic geometrical volumes could exist. Neither could the Mathematical Objects. In fact, without the Indefinite Dyad, there could not even exist that which is minimally complex, that in which existence and essence are distinct. But complexity is, apparently, maximally instantiated. In that case, the One (from H<sub>1</sub>) and One-Being (from H<sub>2</sub>), which is composed of the Indefinite Dyad and the array of essences with which an eternal intellect is cognitively identical, must exist.

Aristotle's testimony regarding the reduction of Forms to the principles of the One and the Indefinite Dyad is, along with the texts in *Republic* on the Good as unhypothetical first principle of all, the most important piece of evidence for the claim that Plato's philosophy is systematic.<sup>148</sup> This evidence also informs us that the system is a *Derivationsystem*, hierarchical in terms of logical or substantial proximity to the first principle.<sup>149</sup> Simply stated, the greater unity there is, the closer something is to the first principle. And the identification of Good and One means that unity is also an index of goodness, or at least of proximity to the achievement of goodness.

It is often supposed that Plato did at some point in his career identify the Good with the One, but that this is a later development.<sup>150</sup> I think it is just

<sup>148</sup> See Merlan 1953, 166–177, for a concise survey of the evidence for Plato's system of derivation of all being from first principles (Merlan uses Zeller's term *Ableitungssystem*) and his qualified support for a positive answer to the question. Hermann 2007, 225, recognizes that the Idea of the Good has a unique and primary explanatory role to play, but he then goes on to claim that it would be wrong to "systematize" this Idea and the Forms into a unified hierarchy. See also Sedley 2007, 269–271, who accepts that "Plato's account of the Good would have been a highly mathematical one." But he is, I think, mistaken in going on to identify the Good as "ideal proportionality." As we will see below in the discussion of *Philebus* in Chapter 6, ideal proportionality is indeed one way that the Good is manifested. But ideal proportionality cannot be what the Good is for the simple reason that ideal proportionality is or has an οὐσία and the Good is beyond οὐσία.

<sup>149</sup> See *Rep.* 6.511B8 on "the things that depend (τὰ ἐχόμενα)" on the first principle; Aristotle, *Meta.* M 8, 1084a32–34, on the "things that follow (τὰ ἐπόμενα)" the first principle. Here together are dependence and hierarchy. If the Forms depend on the Good for their being and knowability, the Good cannot represent a property of these Forms, for example, their goodness. This is how Rowe 2007, 149–150, seems to understand the causality of the Good so that it turns out that a property causes that of which it is a property. Theophrastus, *Meta.* 6b11–16, speaks of a γένεσις of Forms and Numbers from the principles, but no further information is supplied. See Krämer 2014.

<sup>150</sup> See Ross 1951, 54–55, who thinks that their identification follows the writing of *Republic*. So, too, apparently, De Strycker 1970, 464–466.

as likely that Plato was from his early acquaintance with Pythagoreans in southern Italy inclined to identify the One as the first principle of all and that as he began to think about the ontological foundation of his moral realism, he saw the need to identify the One with a superordinate Good.<sup>151</sup> Nothing in my overall argument requires that this is the sequence of doctrinal developments. Nevertheless, I suspect that it was well before writing *Republic* that Plato moved toward the confluence of the Good and the One.

<sup>151</sup> Diogenes Laertius III 6, tells us that Plato was twenty-eight when he visited Philolaus and other Pythagoreans. If this is the case, his Pythagorean interests seem to antedate the writing of any dialogues. See also II 106, on Euclides of Megara, a student of Parmenides. Diogenes says that Plato and others visited him after the death of Socrates. Notably, Euclides held that “the Good is one.”