

Erôs in Plato's Republic

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ABSTRACT

Erôs in Plato's Republic

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The *Republic* is the most studied of Plato's dialogues, yet it is rarely approach as a work that elaborates on the implications of *erôs*. This thesis attempts to show that the *Republic* is also a dialogue about *erôs*, such as the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, for it also aims at providing a direction to man's striving. The *Republic* deals specifically with the morphology of the soul and its erotic nature. The soul is depicted by Plato as a manifold of erotic forces that, if properly ordered, show man his kinship with the Good, the source of all being. The Good is theorized as the eternal and unchanging, placing it outside the world of phenomena. Therefore, the psychological picture provided in the *Republic* is one of the first theorizations of the soul and its transcendental constitution. To this effect, this theoretical approach aims to overcome Kantian interpretations, since they tend to overlook the genuine concern Plato had for metaphysics. The theoretical approach assumes that Plato is concerned with existence and the order of being.

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Introduction

Plato's philosophy, is not *a* philosophy, but *the* symbolic form in which a Dionysiac soul expresses its ascent to God. If Plato's evocation of a paradigm of right order is interpreted as a philosopher's opinion about politics, the result will be hopeless nonsense, not a worth of debate.

– Eric Voegelin, *Order and History* Vol. 3, 125.

Voegelin's assessment of the *Republic* is courageous and unapologetic. If we do not let Voegelin offend our sensibilities and remain open to the possibility that much of what have been said about the *Republic* in the last decades has been "hopeless nonsense," we might be in for a treat. Voegelin does not mean that there are not political implications to Plato's writings, but rather that Plato's thought is *not* properly understood by interpreting the *Republic* as a coherent scheme of opinions. Plato's philosophy, or what Pierre Hadot would refer as *philosophia* "to eliminate the preconceptions the word philosophy may evoke in the modern mind," is not a system of ideas.¹ What is being discussed in the *Republic* is not concepts, but rather realities of human existence.

The distinction between concepts and realities is critical to the argument of this thesis. If we are to say that Plato is concerned with the latter rather than with the former, we are affirming that Plato is concerned with reality itself and hence with how we come to know reality for what it really is. To this effect, such a distinction entails awareness of Emmanuel Kant's influence on the interpretation of the Platonic corpus. The distinction focuses mainly on the restrictions attributed to the mind after his *Critique of Pure Reason*, which focuses on the nature of human knowledge and its objects. In sum, Kant argues that we can only have cognition of appearances and that we cannot really know things in themselves, given that cognition is limited to the cognitive faculties, what we shall refer as the "categories of the understanding."² Kant called his critique "transcendental idealism" or "critical idealism."³

¹ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 53.

² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), A248–A249.

³ Allen W. Wood, *Kant* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 63.

Despite the many virtues of the Kantian tradition, its influence in our contemporary world has a tendency to distort the insights of philosophers such as Plato, who did not set the same restrictions to the mind. In the classical sense, philosophers are people who are in pursuit of truth as reality.⁴ By truth, I simply mean what exists, what is (hence, being). Philosophy is then, strictly speaking, a quest for knowledge of what is, for as Socrates highlights in the *Republic*, we cannot know what it is not (476e; 478a). The main assumption of a classical philosopher is that one can get to know reality for what it really is. Now, ancient thought was not homogeneous and debates about what is real were frequent. In fact, the *Republic* can be approached as a debate between Thrasymachus and Socrates regarding reality. The point of this distinction, however, is not to underestimate the complexity of the ancients, but rather to understand modern thinking and the limits it sets to reason. Prior to Kant, philosophers did not think that the mind could only get to know the representations (appearances) of objects. It is with Kant that we first started to question the capacity of the mind's reach, that is, what the mind can and cannot know. Of course, this is not to say that the pursuit of truth was thought to be a simple matter. On the contrary, the difficulties of knowing reality are masterfully illustrates in the Allegory of the Cave. To this effect, we must understand that Plato assumed that we can get to know reality, that is, the order of being, with the right disposition and a proper education. Perhaps, reality can never be fully known, but we have concrete reasons to believe that Plato, unlike modern thinkers, did not doubt that it is within the nature of reason (*nous*) to know reality and its orderly nature (508d). Note that this assumption about the "knowability" of reality also tells us something about reality itself, that is, reality must be of such a nature that it can be known. In other words, there must be an order in reality that reason (*nous*) is in kinship with and that it is able to grasp.

The change of focus after Kant had led current scholarship to confuse Plato for an atheist. Since *Ideas* are "subjectivized" to the categories of the understanding, Kantian interpretations are unable to appreciate Plato's genuine concern for metaphysics.⁵ Disregarding Plato's emphasis on

⁴ For Plato, reality is equal to the truth (*alêtheia*) since truth about reality is subordinated to truth as reality.

⁵ In other words, *ideas* are regarded simply as concepts, as products of the mind, and not as structures in reality that the mind is able to grasp. These structures derive their existence from the source of all being, which exists beyond the world of phenomena as well as beyond thought and abstractions, that is, beyond the world of becoming (metaphysics). The point is to understand that Plato's argument seeks to provide an intelligible account of reality, a teleological account, based on a First Principle (*archê*) of all being and in all times. This is, of course, part of the intellectual discourse of his time that can be traced back to Thales of Miletus.

the Divine, Kantian interpretations mainly focus on Plato's contribution to the history of ideas.⁶ Thus, while there has always been disagreement concerning interpretations, nowadays Plato is persistently confused for an idealist (in the Kantian sense), as a thinker who is concerned with concepts or prepositions rather than concrete realities and their transcendental constitution. However, as Voegelin rightly points out, Plato does not have *a* philosophy. For Plato, philosophy is a way of life (*philosophia*) that consists on exploring the common experience of existing, the authentic consciousness of the Good, and the seriousness of deciding how to live.⁷ Thus, Plato is not creatively elaborating on ideas of justice and love, for Plato is not a modern thinker and he is not concerned with a place in the history of ideas. Plato inquired into the most important and most troubling *experiences* about human existence, especially about the station of man in the world and the tension towards the ground of his being. When the dialogues are not read in this manner, much of what Plato is about is lost.⁸ Therefore, it is the contention of this thesis that any interpretation of Plato as a thinker concerned with political ideas or concepts is fundamentally flawed.

As an exploration of the experience of being, Plato's *philosophia* is one of the soberest and most insightful accounts on the plight of human existence. It is with Plato that classical Greek thought reach the pinnacle of authentic consciousness of being, resulting in one of the most dignifying redemption of man. Plato's conviction was that man has an essential kinship with the ground of Being (the Good) and that any distortion of his natural essence brings along devastating consequences for his social existence.⁹ Therefore, Plato's main preoccupation was his provision for man's salvation (*sôtêria*), which, not surprisingly, is the subject of the *Republic*.¹⁰

⁶ Note that Divine is capitalized because we are referring to a different plane of existence, which is beyond the world of phenomena as well as beyond thought (abstractions). We are referring to the world of Being. By not capitalizing the word, we take the risk of understanding the Divine as merely an experience, in the phenomenological sense. Yet, for Plato, it was not just as experience, but the Divine is what gives the world of phenomena order and structure.

⁷ Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 53.

⁸ Robert Earl Cushman, *Therapeia: Plato's Conception of Philosophy* (New Brunswick, U.S.A: Transaction Publishers, 2002), xv–xvi; Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 232–235; Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, ed. Dante Germino, vol. 3 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 125.

⁹ Cushman, *Therapeia*, xv.

¹⁰ The word *sotêria* is Plato's choice. See, for example, 492e. Strictly speaking, the word means safety, that is, out of danger. We translate it as salvation because we mean to capture what Plato meant. Now, the meaning of world salvation should not be confused with Christian salvation. To be sure, Plato's understanding does have the overtones, but they are only overtones, for its meaning belongs to the discourse of Heraclitus and the order of the cosmos. Plato wants to save men from chaos.

Essential to understanding the *Republic* is Plato's depiction of man as a rational creature who exists in tension towards the ground of his existence, the Good. This tension is fundamentally an experience, in which man finds himself estranged from and craving for fulfillment. Man is a lover, an erotic being always striving for *that* which stops the yearning and brings meaning. The longing is a human experience that cannot be reduced to a word or a concept. Yet, for the sake of philosophical discourse, Plato called it *erôs*. And, although the *Republic* does not particularly elaborate on *erôs*, as both the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* do, it is the purpose of this thesis to show that *erôs* is the foundation of the argument in the *Republic*. Thus, the central question guiding my research is: *What prompted Plato into inquiry about the nature of justice in the Republic?*

The *Republic* is probably the most studied of Plato's dialogue, yet it is rarely approached as a work that elaborates on the implications of *erôs*.¹¹ The importance that Plato attributed to *erôs* is axiomatic, for he was quite aware that it is the condition of man and hence any human activity is conditioned by it. In other words, the experience of being is, in itself, erotic. For this very reason, Plato was fundamentally preoccupied with ordering the striving of man, what he referred to as *dikaiosune*.¹² Plato's endeavor then consisted in addressing the most important matter of human existence, the seriousness of deciding how to live, what might be called ethics. In this respect, Plato understood that the search for ethical order finds its origin in the experiential quest for fulfillment. Thus, what Plato sought to show in the *Republic* is that *erôs* is a calling to the Good.

Plato elevated the experience of *erôs* as calling to the Good because he believed that all things, including human beings, draw their reality and value from the Good (516b-c). Plato's conviction was that conforming to the order that the Good set before us is man's primary responsibility and ultimate destiny, since man is, by virtue of his *psuchê*, aware of it. To this extent, the *Republic* is also a work about the morphology of the human soul and its kinship with the Good. The soul is the clue and access to order, to reality. In this sense, the dialogue portrays

¹¹ To my knowledge, there are no recent publications in North American academia in which *erôs* is taken to be central for Plato's teleology. *Erôs* is what holds the mortal and the immortal together (*Symp.* 202e). Cosmologically, *erôs* becomes associated with motion and life, through with all being is animate. See Cushman, *Therapeia*, 193; Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 43.

¹² *Dikaiosunê* is often translated as justice, but the English word justice fails to capture some of the most important connotations it carried, particularly ethical connotations. Thus, as we shall see in the literature review, some scholars such as Robin Waterfield choose to translate it as "morality" or "righteousness." See Waterfield's introductory chapter of his translation of the *Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

the search for a standard that has ethical implications for mankind, for Plato recognized that man's salvation lies in properly responding to his calling, to order his life according to the exigencies of the Good. Plato would have not arrived at these conclusions if the experience of *erôs* had not prompted him to inquire into the ground of being. It is Plato's own experience of ascent, as Voegelin points out, that brought this great master to vindicate man's existence.

Thus, in hope of not making nonsense of the dialogue, I will analyze the *Republic* as a symbol of Plato's experience of reality. All citations and translations of the classical texts are from *Plato: Complete Works* by Hackett Publishing Company. This thesis will be divided in four chapters. The first chapter will provide a comprehensive literature review covering different interpretations of Plato's *Republic*. The literature review will explore the debate regarding interpretative approaches as well as the different theses resulting from them. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a context for this thesis and situate it in the recent debate.

The second chapter will deal with the interpretative approach. This thesis will adopt an approach to textual interpretation that focuses on the experience of being. It assumes that Plato's objective was to clarify existence through dialectics. It assumes the *Republic* to be a symbol of Plato's own experience of reality. Most notable scholars using this approach are Robert Earl Cushman, Paul Friedländer, and Eric Voegelin. The theoretical approach understands that the dialogue is concerned with the search for order, and the psyche is the clue and access to this order.

The third chapter will analyze the *Republic* following the logic of the theoretical approach. The analysis will be divided in five sections. The first three sections will focus on contextualizing the dialogue. The first section will look into the motivations that prompted Plato into writing a dialogue of such a considerable length. First, we will explore the historical circumstances in which the dialogue was written, particularly focusing on the rise of the Sophists and the fall of Athens after the Peloponnesian War. Likewise, we will review the intellectual context, namely, the transition from mythical cosmogony to physicalism due to the discovery of Nature.¹³ This first section will also establish one of the main assumptions of the theoretical

¹³ As we shall see in the first part of the analysis, Nature is capitalized because it refers to a specific intellectual discourse dating back to Thales of Miletus and the Ionian scientists of Nature. According to Aristotle, Thales is the first philosopher who sought to discover the origin of all things exclusively in material terms (*Metaphysics*, 983b). Plato's *philosophia* should be seen as a reaction to this intellectual debate, that is, as a restoration of the symbols of transcendence.

framework, that is, the concreteness of Plato's thought. As pointed out by Socrates, the inquiry into the nature of justice is not a question of conventions or ideas, but a question of "what is" in reality (438e).

The second section of the analysis elaborates on the research question of the dialogue, "what justice and injustice are and what power each has when it is by itself in the soul?" (358b), which is proposed by Plato's brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus. We will see in this section an articulate account of the arguments that Plato attempts to disprove, including those which find corroboration in traditional education.

The third section of the analysis will deal with the underlying assumption that guides the investigation in the dialogue, that is, the city is the soul written large (368d-e). Here, we will see how Plato's discourse (in the Foucaudian sense) belongs to an intellectual discussion regarding the discovery of the mind and its experience of transcendence. The underlying assumption is not taken to be a metaphor or an analogy, but rather as an insight into human existence.

The fourth section of the analysis will explore the investigation of the dialogue, particularly, Plato's depiction of man as a lover and how the order is found through love (*erôs*). Therefore, this section tackles Plato's exploration of the morphology of the psyche and its kinship with the Good. The last part of the analysis will deal with the answer Socrates provides to Glaucon's and Adeimantus' challenge. Plato understands the calling to the Good as a human experience that compels man to an ethical standard. Plato sought to show that all men feel the tension towards the Good and that following its ethical standard is a matter not only of responsibility, but also of choice (617e). This is exemplified in the myth of Er, a Pamphylian, a man "of all tribes" (613b), who upon his death learned that virtue was a philosophical matter (619d).

Finally, the last chapter will provide a summary of the analysis, the significance of the research, and some concluding remarks.

Literature Review

The debates regarding the interpretation of Plato's *Republic* are as controversial as they are philosophically fascinating, for they mirror the current state of philosophical inquiry. Probably, one should start by wondering why Plato has captured so much attention in the past decades and why there is such a diversification of approaches.

Most of what is written on Plato's *Republic* in the last century is to a great extent a response to Karl Popper's accusations against Plato in his book *The Open Society and its Enemies*. Written during the Second World War, Popper's book sought to expose Plato as an ideologue and one of the first totalitarian thinkers whose works represent a menace to liberal democracies and open societies in general.¹⁴ Scholars wishing to defend Plato had necessarily to face the fact that Plato was neither a liberal nor a democrat. It was then apparent that a new interpretative strategy had to be presented in which Plato could be rescued from such accusations. In North American academic circles, Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin are the most influential scholars who wished to vindicate Plato. They both argued that Popper's interpretation of Plato was a result of the modern crisis of philosophical illiteracy.¹⁵ When philosophy started with Socrates, it was *traditionally* understood that philosophy was the pursuit of truth, namely, the pursuit of knowledge of all things, knowledge of what *is*. By traditionally, I mean an interpretation that understands Plato's ontology to be partly "existentialist," for it is concerned with ὄντα (being).¹⁶ In the *Republic*, this interpretation is based on Socrates' claim that someone

¹⁴ Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 87.

¹⁵ Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies*, 1st ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1988), 12; Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, ed. Gerhart Niemeyer (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1990), 7.

¹⁶ The quotation marks on existentialist are in order because it should not be confused with modern existentialism as represented by Jean Paul Sartre or Albert Camus. Existentialism sustains that all philosophical thinking begins with the human subject, that is, with the conscious, thinking, acting, feeling, and living individual. Existentialism is characterized by a sense of absurdity, a sense of disorientation and confusion. See Robert C. Solomon, *Existentialism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1–2. Furthermore, existentialism is consistent and in favor of an atheist approach to existence. See James Wood's introductory chapter in Sartre's *Nausea*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin Classics, 2000). Existentialism understood in this manner is alien to Plato's

who knows must know something that is, for it is not possible to know something that is not (476e-479e).¹⁷ To this extent, Plato is understood to be fundamentally a realist, that is, Plato understood reality to be one and knowable. In this sense, philosophy is the quest for the truth of being. The main representatives of the traditional interpretation previous to Strauss and Voegelin are A. E. Taylor and Paul Shorey.

There are, of course, scholars that contest Socrates' claim (476e-479e) to be partly "existentialist." They are known as analytical philosophers. Gail Fine, for example, argues that the *Republic* does not present a realist epistemology structured on the distinction of different forms of being. For Fine, the difference between knowledge and opinion (*doxa*) does not rest in objects, but in *prepositions* about objects.¹⁸ We will not further elaborate on these authors since they represent exactly what Strauss and Voegelin were trying to overcome. Instead, we will place the discussion in the dispute between Strauss and Voegelin as they are the major representatives of political philosophy.

Strauss and his Influence

Although the similarities between Strauss and Voegelin are strongest in their diagnosis of the modern crisis, their vindications of Plato point in two different directions. It is our contention that their point of departure rest on whether or not Plato should be read as a theist or an atheist, namely, whether Plato made an actual distinction between phenomenal and trans-phenomenal reality. Strauss does not recognize that Plato distinguishes two different modes of existence, that is, the world of Becoming (*genesis*) and the world of Being (*ousia*). Both, Strauss' background and the issues that dominated his scholarly work, demonstrate that he did not believe that the pursuit of truth (*philosophia*) is compatible with transcendental reality, which he referred as the conflict between reason and revelation. From Strauss' perspective, the yearning for God is man's

experiences. Plato was indeed concerned with the acting and living person, but the world was not seen as absurd or voided of divine mystery. Plato was in fact looking for a standard. Thus, by "existentialist," we simply mean that Plato is concerned with existence, with all being. See Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 232.

¹⁷ For a fuller account of this schematic picture, see Italian scholar Francesco Fronterotta, "Plato's Republic in the Recent Debate," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48, no. 2 (2010): 125–51.

¹⁸ Gail Fine, *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected Essays* (Clarendon Press, 2003), 84.

deepest desire.¹⁹ Yet, a yearning does not constitute any proof of the existence of another plane of existence. This is, of course, a realization of reason, which, according to Strauss, has its origin in Socrates' and Plato's *philosophia*.²⁰ Thus, as Stanley Rosen notes, Strauss "rejects metaphysics altogether."²¹

Strauss' analysis of the *Republic* in *The City and Man* as well as his chapter on Plato in *History of Political Philosophy* confirm the assessment. From Strauss' perspective, the *Republic* only means to bring to light the nature of political things.²² Strauss is correct to highlight that the dialogues intent to explore man as a political animal, but as we shall see, the exploration concerns the social existence of man vis-à-vis his relation with the Divine. Yet, throughout his analysis of the *Republic*, Strauss ignores Plato's genuine concern for metaphysics, focusing solely on the political implications of the dialogue. For example, if we look at his interpretation of the "doctrine of ideas," as he refers to it, ideas remain objects of the intellect, that is, categories of the "understanding." What is transcendental about ideas is their impossibility to be embodied in phenomenal reality.²³ In other words, there is nothing truly transcendental about them; they are just objects of thought. Note that this is partially the reason why Strauss deems the "ideal" city as impossible, for the pattern transcends history.²⁴ In other words, the city cannot come into being because the city is just a city in speech.²⁵ To this effect, for Strauss, the *Republic* is a work that is primarily political, that is, it is concerned only with the world of phenomena and not with transcendental reality.²⁶

Strauss' approach belongs to the so-called "dialogical approach," which contends that the dialogues are dramas and hence they must be read as dramas.²⁷ This interpretation starts by the recognition that Plato conceals himself completely behind his characters. As a result, it is not

¹⁹ Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 55.

²⁰ See Letter 3 to Voegelin, November 24 1942, in: Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper, eds., *Faith And Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964* (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri, 2004), 7.

²¹ Stanley Rosen, "The Theological Conflict Between Strauss and Voegelin," in *Faith And Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*, ed. Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri, 2004), 266.

²² Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1978), 138.

²³ *Ibid.*, 118–120; Leo Strauss, "Plato," in *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1987), 54.

²⁴ Strauss, *The City and Man*, 120.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁶ Of course, this appreciation of the *Republic* is not new and we can trace its origins to German Idealism.

²⁷ Strauss, *The City and Man*, 59.

possible to ascribe to Plato any particular position presented in the dialogue, not even Socrates' position. To this effect, the *Republic* is an esoteric work and as such, in order to interpret it properly, it must be read by applying the law of logographic necessity, which assumes that every piece of the dialogue is deliberate and necessary.²⁸ In addition, since the *Republic* is strictly a political work, Strauss sustains that it should be read alongside Aristophanes' *Clouds*, for it brings out the esoteric and ironic features of Plato's style.²⁹ The *Clouds* is a work that satirizes Athenian democracy and when read together with the *Republic*, it shows that Plato was not serious about his provisions for the city in speech, that is, Plato is not suggesting an actual rule by philosopher kings. The city is impossible not simply because it is an object of thought, but because it goes against nature, specifically because "the claims of *eros* are simply silenced."³⁰ By *eros*, Strauss means specifically sexual appetitive, which, according to Strauss, is replaced with other drives such as patriotism, dedication to the common good, and justice.³¹ Thus, according to Strauss, the *Republic*, if properly interpreted, "conveys the broadest and deepest analysis of political idealism ever made."³² The reduction of the "ideal" city to thought and irony allows Strauss to make an even more extraordinary claim. Given that the city cannot be because it goes against nature, it follows that democracy rises as the best actual regime that could be embodied in history.³³ Thus, by reducing the city in speech to an object of thought and by reading it as an ironical political work, Strauss not only vindicates Plato from being a menace to open societies, but he also proposes a reading that makes the dialogue appealing to democrats.

Strauss' approach to the dialogue is interesting, particularly regarding his methodology. It cannot be denied that there has been contribution about how to properly read a dialogue. Strauss is absolutely correct to point that we cannot simply attribute to Plato any of the opinion of the dialogue without a due analysis of its totality. Yet, it is precisely in this point that we find Strauss' analysis deficient. The *Republic* does illustrate a tension between truth and the poems of the poets, what Strauss might have identified as the tension between reason and revelation. But the dialogue does not expose a tension between reason and theology. If anything, the *Republic*

²⁸ Ibid., 60.

²⁹ Ibid., 63.

³⁰ Ibid., 117.

³¹ Ibid., 111.

³² Ibid., 127.

³³ Ibid., 131. This conclusion rises from Strauss' own comparison between the sequence of regimes in the *Republic* and Hesiod's ages of the metals. Democracy comes closer to the golden age.

attempts to a theological revision that is in synch with reason, especially because it is the quality of reason to reach beyond the world of Becoming. In other words, Strauss has to prove that Plato himself limited the reach of reason to the world of Becoming, and that his works have nothing to do with transcendental reality. This is something that his analysis on the *Republic* did not establish. Thus, it is our assessment that the limits Strauss subscribes to reason are of a personal nature and that they show his own views on *philosophia*, which are alien to Plato's.³⁴

Strauss' followers include Allan Bloom, Seth Bernardete, Leon Craig, and Stanley Rosen. All of them agree that Plato was an esoteric philosopher who had some particular ethical and political teachings that cannot be explicitly found in the dialogue.³⁵ Furthermore, they all agree with Strauss' thesis that the *Republic* deliberately and ironically disregards features of the human condition and the differences between individuals, which places the argument concerning the ideal city against the forces of nature, hence emphasizing the irony of the project.³⁶ We cannot help but agree with Strauss and Straussians that Plato's provisions for the "ideal" city are extreme. But the irony of the project cannot be proven by this reason alone, nor even by reading the dialogue along lines consistent with Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Socrates is explicit about the feasibility of the "ideal" city several times (499b; 502c) and his distinction between theory and practice does not render the argument ironic (473a). Socrates is again explicit that he was trying to describe how a good city *could* come to be. This does not mean that it could not happen, but rather that, *if* it happens, it will not be *exactly* the same, but close enough. Perhaps, Straussians would have less difficulty in understanding Plato's provisions for the "ideal" city if they would not try to make the dialogue more political than it actually is. As we shall see, Voegelin rightly points out that the dialogue is not concerned with political opinions, but rather with a sublime experience of ascent. The argument in the *Republic* is not trying to convey some "truths" about political systems and, to this extent, regarding it as a critique on political ideology obfuscates the experiences expressed in the symbolism.

³⁴ We will develop Plato's view on *philosophia* on the analysis of the dialogue.

³⁵ Seth Benardete, *Socrates' Second Sailing: On Plato's Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1–5; Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1991), xviii; Leon Harold Craig, *The War Lover: A Study of Plato's Republic* (University of Toronto Press, 1996), xxiii; Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Republic: A Study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 2.

³⁶ Benardete, *Socrates' Second Sailing*, 125; Bloom, *The Republic Of Plato*, 381; Craig, *The War Lover*, 217; Rosen, *Plato's Republic*, 5.

Inspired by the “dialogical approach,” a group of scholars in the early 1990s argued that it was necessary to take this interpretation a step further. They believed that scholars such as Strauss “continued to believe that the drama was subordinated to the philosophy and that the drama exists as a corroborative adornment to reinforce the arguments.”³⁷ Among these scholars we find James A. Arieti and Gerald A. Press, both arguing that the philosophy must be subordinated to the drama, namely the dialogues are dramas and not merely dramatic.³⁸ Arieti understands the *Republic* to be a literary work meant to attract students to the Academy.³⁹ For Arieti, Plato is telling his audience that the *Republic* is an imitation itself and should not be taken to be a true reflection of the idea of justice. The imitation must be replaced with a real discussion; Plato is inviting us to engage in active philosophy ourselves.⁴⁰ Arieti argues that the dialogue shows the repercussions of the extreme Socratic life teaching us to strive for a mean between the active life of politics and philosophy.⁴¹

Press has a similar thesis to Arieti’s. He also understands the dialogues to be encouraging philosophical activity rather than particular philosophical doctrines or beliefs.⁴² In fact, Press argues that the central questions in the dialogues are “moral, ethical and political, rather than questions of logic, epistemology and metaphysics.”⁴³ Press believes that Plato did not mean to divide reality into two realms utterly separated from each other so as to make various true statements.⁴⁴ The *Republic* shows a vision, that is, a particular way of understanding the world about lower and higher lives, the philosophical one being the best kind of life.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Press argues that Plato understood philosophy to be intellectual and moral, theoretical and practical. The *Republic* is, for example, a theoretical work since it makes us think about moral concepts.⁴⁶

³⁷ James A. Arieti, *Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama* (Savage, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1991), 11.

³⁸ James A. Arieti, “Plato’s Philosophical Antiope: The Gorgias,” in *Plato’s Dialogues: New Studies & Interpretations*, by Gerald A. Press (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1993), 197.

³⁹ Arieti, *Interpreting Plato*, 231.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Arieti, “Plato’s Philosophical Antiope: The Gorgias,” 214.

⁴² Gerald A. Press, *Plato: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Guides for the Perplexed (London ; New York: Continuum, 2007), 150.

⁴³ Ibid., 152.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 163.

⁴⁵ Press, *Plato: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 170.

⁴⁶ Press, *Plato: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 173.

Arieti and Press should receive some merit for recognizing that the dialogue is best understood when placed in its historical context. However, they not only suffer from the same deficiency of Strauss' interpretation, but they also lack philosophical insight. The subordination of philosophy to drama makes Plato a poet rather than a philosopher. Of course, Plato was a poet in the sense that he used poetry to express his insights. But poetry is merely a tool of communication to express his philosophical experience. Plato's object was not the production of a philosophical work, namely, a book. The *Republic* is not philosophy. For Plato, a philosopher may or may not write. Socrates did not write a word. For Plato, philosophy is the turning around of the soul towards the Good (521c). Philosophy is an act of living people, whose goal is the ascent toward the Good. In contrast, the object of poetry is the expression of an experience, which may or may not be concerned with the Good. Likewise, Arieti's and Press' interpretation reduce philosophy to discussion, completely stripping *philosophia* from its directional intent. Philosophy is no longer the pursuit for truth, but rather the questioning of it. Note how this is a result of an atheist approach to Plato.

Voegelin and Psychological Approaches

Voegelin took a more traditional approach to defend the *Republic* from Popper's accusations. By traditional, I mean that Voegelin did not argue that Plato was being ironical about the ideal city.⁴⁷ Voegelin rather sought to understand the predominant role that Plato attributed to the *psuchê*. Like Strauss, Voegelin realizes that Plato differentiates reason from the experiences of faith and trust (*pistis*), as well as, from experiences of love (*philia, erôs*).⁴⁸ Yet, Voegelin recognizes that it is precisely because of the love for truth that Plato distinguishes between the world of Becoming and the world of Being.⁴⁹ Voegelin notes that it became imperative for Plato to remove that source of the order from the cosmos since it is a *philosophical* necessity.⁵⁰ Thus, Voegelin understands that a proper reading of Plato is one that does not try to make Plato an atheist, but rather recognizes that, for Plato, the dissociation of the cosmos from the Good is a question of

⁴⁷ Unlike Strauss, Voegelin did not distant himself from traditional interpretations of Plato such as A. E. Taylor and Paul Shorey

⁴⁸ Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 97.

⁴⁹ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:332.

⁵⁰ Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 78.

reason (not of faith). The *psuchê* is then attributed a paramount role precisely because it shows man his relation with the Divine. From this follows, that any reading of Plato as an atheist, ultimately misinterprets the overall meaning of the dialogue.

Voegelin's analysis of the *Republic* has not become very influential in certain circles. Probably, the main the reason for Voegelin's unpopularity is that academia has developed distaste for studies that consider the experience of the Divine as a serious matter.⁵¹ This thesis will try to remedy that by following Voegelin's approach, which will be further developed in the theoretical framework. Meanwhile, it must be recognize that Voegelin is not the only scholar who recognized that Plato gave a predominant role to the *psuchê*. The centrality of the soul in Plato's *Republic* has prompted some scholars to disregard the political considerations of the dialogue and focus on the ethical and psychological sphere. Giovanni R. F. Ferrari argues that it is better to think of the *Republic* as work of moral philosophy, for Plato explicitly subordinates politics to the human soul.⁵² Ferrari also believes that regarding the *Republic* primarily as a political work lends itself to fascist interpretations since one is required to classify its political stance.⁵³ There is, of course, for Ferrari a genuine political interest in the *Republic*, but no direct link between the political thought and individual ethics.⁵⁴ In other words, for Ferrari, the *Republic* is more of a work on human psychology, which introduces an analogy between the city and the psyche.

Ferrari's approach is interesting to us to the extent that he is quite right to point out that there is a psychological interest in Plato. What is more, he is also correct to highlight that the dialogue is build on Socrates' assumption than the city is the soul written large. Yet, Ferrari's approach understands the assumption as a proportional metaphor, that is, as an analogy between city and soul.⁵⁵ However, Plato never uses the word *analogos* when referring to the assumption that the city is the soul written large (351e; 369a; 432b; 434d-e; 435b; 441c; 445c; 472c-d; 541b; 543-544a; 548d; 553a; 558c; 571a; 577c-d; 605b; 608a-b). And yet, this word (*analogos*) is used when Socrates intents to elucidate the Good by comparing it to the sun. Why is this? We can only assume that Plato did mean the comparison of the Good and sun as analogy, whereas he did not

⁵¹ See Patrick Johnston, "Silence Is Not Always Golden: Investigating the Silence Surrounding the Thought of Eric Voegelin," *Voegeliniana*, Occasional Papers, no. 72 (October 2008).

⁵² G. R. F. Ferrari, "Introduction," in *The Republic*, by Plato, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), xxiii.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ G. R. F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's Republic* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 89.

⁵⁵ Ferrari, "Introduction," 59.

mean that the city is the soul written large as an analogy. As we shall see, Socrates' assumption, that the city is the soul written large, is not an analogy *per se*, but rather an anthropological principle, that is, an assumption about man's mode of existence. Thus, treating Socrates' assumption as an analogy produces errors in the interpretation of the dialogue. For example, Ferrari ignores any reference to metaphysics in the dialogue, making the work merely psychological.

Another scholar that recognizes the centrality of the soul in the *Republic* is Julia Annas. She takes a more radical stand than Ferrari and dismisses completely the political arguments in the *Republic*, for they are so extreme that they are not worth of any political consideration.⁵⁶ Instead, Plato's intentions are to define the conditions of an ethic of the just, in terms of virtue and happiness, as to allow the soul to reproduce the harmony of the ideal city, which is only an example.⁵⁷ Plato's ethical thought is then "structured by a broad eudaimonist assumption."⁵⁸ Furthermore, the *Republic* is an ethical dialogue "structured as an answer to the question, how one ought to live (*Republic* 344e)."⁵⁹ For Plato, one ought to be virtuous because only then can one be happy. Being virtuous is having an ordered soul. Having an ordered soul is being like a god, which reveals the insignificance of the human life.⁶⁰

We agree with Annas that the dialogue is structured to answer an ethical question. Yet, for Annas, the search for the answer is limited to the world of Becoming. In fact, the forms, as objects of thought, have reference only to phenomena.⁶¹ In other words, there is no knowledge beyond phenomena, which again portrays Plato as atheist. It must be stressed that Annas' analysis excels when compared to other approaches since she appreciates the realism in Plato's work, that is, happiness is dealt in the *Republic* as a concrete phenomenon. However, because Plato is read as an atheist, Annas finds the ending of the dialogue lame and messy.⁶² Again, as we shall see, there is nothing messy or awkward about Plato's *Republic* if one does not choose to assume that Plato was an atheist.

⁵⁶ Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 91.

⁵⁷ Julia Annas, "Plato's Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, by Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 283.

⁵⁸ Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New*, 269.

⁵⁹ Annas, "Plato's Ethics," 272.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁶¹ Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press, 1981), 236–238.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 353.

Theoretical Approach

We have previously mentioned two main assumptions when approaching the *Republic*. First, we must reject interpretations of Plato that have been greatly influenced by Kant, for Plato was not a modern thinker and he did not restrict reason as modern thinkers do today. For Plato, the mind has the ability to know the truth. In the classical sense, truth (*alêtheia*) means what is, what exists.⁶³ This essentially means that Plato was concerned with existence.⁶⁴ Thus, this thesis will adopt an “existentialist” approach to textual interpretation, which assumes that Plato’s objective was to clarify existence through dialectics.⁶⁵ The assumption is that the dialogue is not concerned with concepts and opinions *per se*, but rather with *experiences*, in particular, with our common experience of being human. The only way we can communicate, explain, and explore our experiences is by discussing them. Moreover, as a philosophical work, the dialogue is not simply concerned with inducing dialogue about these experiences, but also with *truth (alêtheia)* about existence. The discussion aims at discovering what these experiences tell us about reality, that is, about us, about the cosmos, and all things.

Now, if Plato’s intentions were so, if Plato wanted to clarify existence, there must be concord and reciprocity of both the content and the dialogue form. As D. C. Schindler rightly points out, we ought to expect that “the content determines the form and the form reflects the content.”⁶⁶ Of course, such an approach is not limited to Platonic dialogues, but rather it is concerned with knowing how to read. Most books are moderately easy to read and both content

⁶³ Initially, as found in Homer, *alêtheia* meant truth as opposed to lie (*Iliad*, 24.407). After Homer, it also meant reality as opposed to appearance. It meant what exists, what is. See for example, Thucydides’ *Peloponnesian War*, 2.41; Plato’s *Statesman*, 300c; Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, 2.1.27; Aristotle’s *Politics*, 1278b33. *Alêtheia* developed the meaning of reality since truth about reality is subordinated to truth as reality.

⁶⁴ We are arguing that Plato’s ontology is concerned with ὄντα (being). This interpretation is based on Socrates’ claim about knowledge in 476e-479e.

⁶⁵ Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 232.

⁶⁶ D. C. Schindler, *Plato’s Critique of Impure Reason: On Goodness and Truth in the Republic* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 28.

and form are relatively evident. However, the greatest works of mankind such as Plato's dialogues are not as accessible, for the content concerns authentic *consciousness* of being.

Consciousness of being is an *experience* that man has by virtue of his reason when he becomes *fully* aware of his existence. Man starts consciously exploring his experiential life, that is, man inquires into the origin, the meaning, and the purpose of his existence.⁶⁷ The experience is, of course, a historical development. It concerns the evolution of man as man, and particularly with his psychological development. By evolution, I mean simply change according to the environment, which is its scientific meaning, rather than progress.⁶⁸ Consciousness of being can be traced in history, especially because it is the foundation for different cultures.⁶⁹ For example, think of the multiplicity of cultures and how representations of the gods vary across history.

Voegelin's life work is concerned precisely with how man has come to understand himself in the world throughout history. Voegelin understands that consciousness of being is motivated by an experience of inadequacy.⁷⁰ Man finds himself dissatisfied. He is alienated, namely, separated from that which he truly desires. Man realizes that he is *always* yearning and in constant quest for fulfillment. In other words, man becomes conscious of *erôs*, and thus, it is this force that prompts man to inquire about existence. The inquiry could lead man to realize that, regardless of his own mortality, what he truly desires is not finite. Ultimate fulfillment can only be found in the Beyond, in the everlasting world, in eternity.⁷¹ Thus, the exploration of *erôs* can lead to another experience, the experience of the Divine. Note that what is common is the experience of *erôs*, whether it is a conscious or an unconscious experience, man is at odds with himself. Man is always yearning. This yearning cannot be satiated. It is always with us and never really leaves us. The exploration of this experience can lead to the experience of the Divine, which can be experienced in a multiplicity of ways. For example, consider again the differences

⁶⁷ Eric Voegelin, "The Beginning and the Beyond," in *What Is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings*, ed. Thomas Hollweck and Paul Caringella (Baton Rouge: University of Missouri, 1990), 174.

⁶⁸ Brian K. Hall and Benedikt Hallgrímsson, *Strickberger's Evolution*, 4th ed. (Sudbury, Mass: Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2007), 4–5.

⁶⁹ Note that this is not a linear understanding of history. By arguing that consciousness of being can be traced in history, we simply mean that we can study cultures and the way people understood themselves within these cultures. Now, because man evolves psychologically, it does not mean that he stops being a man. Our interest is how this common experience of being a man is understood differently through history.

⁷⁰ Voegelin, "The Beginning and the Beyond," 170.

⁷¹ To be sure, the *Republic* is not a dialogue that suggest ultimate fulfillment in the Beyond. A communion with God that stops all yearning is a Christian striving rather than a Platonic one. Yet, in several of the Platonic dialogues, Socrates does speak of an afterlife that is greater and more fulfilling. In the *Republic*, good souls will enjoyed a blessed existence in heaven before returning to earth (614d-616a).

between the representations of gods across history and cultures. Each of those representations is a particular experience.

To this extent, this approach to interpretation understands the *Republic* as a symbol of Plato's exploration of existence. The whole dialogue is itself a symbol of Plato's experience of reality. Plato does not present doctrines or opinions, but rather he presents artistically something of his own experience about the nature of reason (*nous*) and of reasoning, and its kinship with the Divine. Thus, Plato tried to recreate the nature of his experience so that it might be grasped by others. As Friedländer explains, Plato "had caught sight of the *Eidos*, and was then confronted with the task of making his intuition permanently visible through the Logos."⁷² Friedländer is quite correct to point out the experience, that is, the insight into the Good as determinant of Plato's intentions. Yet, intuition might not be the best word choice, for what Plato saw is akin to reason (*nous*) and was the result of conscious reasoning. Through conscious reasoning, Plato had become aware not simply of *erôs*, but of Being. This is the particular experience that Plato sought to convey. The common experience of *erôs* becomes fully conscious to Plato as a call to Being. As illustrated in several of his dialogues, *erôs* led Plato to inquire about *alêtheia*, which resulted in the discovery of the Good, the source of order and all being. As Cushman argues, Plato's thought is "properly made by way of his interpretation of man, man whose rational existence is in jeopardy because he is divorced from the ground of Being despite the telltale signs of his essential kinship with it."⁷³

This brings us to our second assumption. As we have seen, the "existentialist" approach can take two different directions concerning the nature of existence. Either we approach the dialogue assuming that Plato was an atheist, namely, that he thought that reality only engulfed the world of phenomena (including abstract thoughts). Or we assume that Plato was not only concerned with the world of phenomena, but that he had a genuine concern for trans-phenomenal reality. In other words, should Plato be approached as an atheist or as a theist? Our contention is that Plato should be approached as a theist. Now, it might appear as if the distinction is creating a false dichotomy between atheism and theism. It could be argued that there is a way in which Plato could be read as neither, that is, as an agnostic. However, such an approach assumes that

⁷² Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 25. The choice of word could be attributed to Meyerhoff since Friedländer did not write in English.

⁷³ Cushman, *Therapeia*, xvi.

reason cannot tell whether or not God, the Divine, or the supernatural exists, which bring us back again to the Kantian tradition. What is primordial is that we understand that theism does not mean *certainty* about the Divine. It only means that if we trust the exigencies of reason, they drive us to the existence of God. If we choose to be suspicious of reason and its capacities, then reality is unknowable or limited to phenomena. This might be the case. We are not arguing that Plato had certainty of the Divine or that God existed. We are simply assuming that Plato was not suspicious of reason as modern thinkers are. Now, this assumption should not be mistaken for a Christian reading of Plato. Instead, it should be understood as a logical deduction from the evidence at hand. To start, Plato's God is distant, namely, it does not get involved in history. God is just the source of order. Moreover, while man yearns for God (*erôs*), God does not love man (*agapê*). These are crucial distinctions that can only be understood when the dialogue is read in its specific historical context. To this effect, we argue that Plato's *Republic* gains its specific meaning in the historical situation of Athens as well as in the "intellectual" background of philosophers that preceded Plato such as Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides. All these will be further explored in the analysis.

Clearly, the main weakness of the approach is that in seeking to explain Plato's insights, we run into the difficulty of reifying them. For example, Plato sought to elevate the experience of dissatisfaction to a standard, that is, the Good. The Good is itself an experience and not an idea or object of thought. Put differently, Plato did not think the Good to be a necessary concept on which to build a theory of ethics. On the contrary, Plato *experienced* himself being drawn to the Good and tried to show that not only all men share the experience, but they all have the moral responsibility to conform to it. In modern times, reification might be harder to overcome, for we live in a time of idealism (we are mostly concerned with ideas and concepts). As explained earlier, Plato was not a modern philosopher and he did not set the same limits on reason as do modern thinkers. Plato's writings seek to communicate an experience that did not arise from conceptual construction. Plato was not concerned with a place in the history of ideas.

Whilst not concerned with conceptualizations, an approach based on experience cannot prevent them from arising. Concepts are necessary for expressing experiences. However, concepts are merely tools and not the focus; the focus should always remain on the common experience of human yearning. Plato makes this explicit in the *Republic* by suggesting that excessive rigidity in the choice of terms is unworthy, for what really matters is the object of

investigation, the love for the source of being (533c-e). Thus, the only way to avoid rectification is to be very aware that we are not dealing with concepts, but with concrete realities, in this case, the experience of being. Of course, this is not to say, for example, that Plato's characters are concrete realities. They are abstractions, somewhat based on realities, that speak to our experiential life.⁷⁴ Plato sought to encourage his readers to explore life by making them relate to the characters through their own experiences. The dialogue aims at making the readers fully conscious of their own experience of being.

The main strength of this approach is that, in identifying the experience of being as central to Plato's thought, one must try to understand who we are as human beings, particularly because this experience is unique to man. In other words, in order to join the conversation of the dialogue, one must take an honest look within oneself. Paradoxical as it may seem, this thesis argues that one of the main reasons Plato has been greatly misinterpreted in the past decades is because modern man does not understand who he is or what he wants. Modern man does not understand his erotic nature as yearning for the Divine. Modern man is numbed to any experience of the Divine. He is convinced that he has been socialized into theist beliefs. Thus, he embraces skepticism and modern science to free himself from these bonds. The result is a new form of socialization, an atheist one, and more often than not, an anti-theist one, that closes all doors to experiences of transcendence, including those experiences that took place over a thousand years ago. In this sense, this approach provides an insight into the psychological state of our times.

⁷⁴ Socrates and his interlocutors are historical figures that impersonate a stereotype of the different ways of life. Of course, Plato did not show the full complexity of their characters and they will always remain historical figures seen through Plato's eyes. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore that Plato's characters were real people who had real lives. They did exist and we do have other sources from which we can try to have a better grasp on who these people were as to understand why Plato chose them for his dialogues.

Analysis

The analysis presents five subdivisions following Eric Voegelin's organization of the *Republic*.⁷⁵ Voegelin's analysis provides a rich historical account that focuses on the motivating experiences behind Plato's argument for the right order of man and society. I will focus on how the search for order is ultimately the ordering of man's striving, thus putting *erôs* in the spotlight. The purpose is to show that the *Republic* is also a dialogue about *erôs* inasmuch as the question "what is justice?" finds its origins and its answer there. It is in this dialogue that Plato finds his voice by elevating *erôs* to a divine calling. In the *Republic*, Plato gives *erôs* a direction.

The Prelude

The *Republic* opens with an elaborate symbolic scene that sets the foundations for the discussion of justice. The opening scene resembles that of the *Symposium*, Plato's dialogue on *erôs*. Both settings are harbor towns, the Piraeus and the Phaleron. In both scenes, characters are walking toward Athens and, in both scenes, these characters are detained by someone calling from behind, asking them to stop (*Rep.* 327b; *Symp.* 172a). However, unlike the *Symposium*, the *Republic* does not unfold in Athens. Socrates descends to the Piraeus and stays there among his friends. The Piraeus is a symbol of Hades, for the goddess to whom Socrates offers his prayers is Bendis, known by the Athenians as the chthonian Hecate who looks after the souls on their way to the underworld.⁷⁶ The richness in symbolism rests in the fact that, from the very beginning of the dialogue, Plato presents us with at least three aspects of human existence. First, we have the symbols of ascent and descent, that is, a direction toward life or death. Second, descending or ascending is portrayed as a matter of choice. Socrates chooses to descend and ascend (328b).

⁷⁵ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:100.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:108.

Likewise, the prologue presents us with the equality of man before death, since Socrates finds the festival for the goddess of the underworld to be equal in splendor to those of the Athenians (327a). The relation between choice and ascent and the equality of man is brought to light at the end of the dialogue with the myth of Er. For the time being, what is important to remark is that Socrates' descent is significant insofar as he is presented as the rescuer of his companions, for the scene symbolizes the human condition as it were about our existing in Hades. Man is an apparently damned creature whose existence is destined to darkness. A careful reader will find that the symbolism at the opening of the *Republic* expresses the depth of Plato's preoccupation, for the prologue poses a question that runs through the whole dialogue: Can man find a way out of the underworld?

In light of this question, the search for justice takes on a meaning quite beyond a competition for the best argument or the most accurate definition. Socrates and his interlocutors, particularly Glaucon and Adeimantus, are in the search for clarity within darkness. Now, the above question may be as well followed by another question: why is it that man seeks a way out of darkness? As rhetorical as it may seem, Plato took this question very seriously. The direction of the striving matters. This becomes apparent also by the timing in which the conversation takes place, for it starts late in the afternoon and lasts until dawn. Thus, if we pay attention to the gradual transformation of the symbols across the dialogue, we will find that they express and define Plato's own experience of ascent. Plato descends to the underworld, as everyone does, and he is chained in the cave, as everyone else. Yet, he is not held by darkness. Plato finds Socrates, the torchbearer who will show him the way up to life. The experience is described as a matter of choice and as the achievement of authentic consciousness of being, that is, as the recognition of a common humanity that speaks of the station of man in the order of things as well as the responsibility of such a realization.

The rich complexity of the symbolism in the opening scene is characteristic of Plato's undisputable talent as a poet. It is not a straightforward instruction and it must be interpreted within the totality of the dialogue as well as within the intricate historical circumstances. Plato himself was not oblivious of this, for the opening scene is followed by three verbal exchanges that mean to provide the context that motivated Plato's ascent. To this extent, in order to appreciate Plato's construction of the *Republic*, it is imperative to understand the historical context in which it was written. When Plato sat to write the *Republic* around 380 B.C., Athens

had undergone traumatic experiences. In 404 B.C., the city fell after almost thirty years of war between the Greek states. The Golden Age of Athens, a period of Athenian political supremacy, economic prosperity, and cultural flourishing that lasted throughout the fifth century, culminated in the darkest tragedy of the Ancient world. Athens will never recover from such a calamity. The disaster had repercussions far beyond the political, for the morale of Athenians was nearly destroyed.⁷⁷ Sparta had not only demonstrated its military superiority, but acute minds understood that Spartan self-discipline and rigorous education largely contributed to their victory.⁷⁸ Athenian customs were depreciated, which enabled the cruel and oppressive rule of the Thirty Tyrants, a pro-Spartan oligarchy. Of course, this was a reactionary regime, the result of an immediate reaction that did not last more than thirteen months. However, not two years later, after the Thirty were expelled, democracy was restored, and amnesty proclaimed, the catastrophe was neither solved nor forgotten. It could not be ignored that, during the war, internal conflicts, including treason (i.e. Alcibiades), had been the order of the day. Once Socrates, the personification of justice, was executed, it was evident to any intelligent and sensible citizen that the fall of Athens was due to moral corruption.⁷⁹ As Voegelin points out, Socrates was condemned by Athens and the gods condemned Athens for it.⁸⁰ The blow struck so deep that it is in this period that Athenians first started to turn inwards; they started to reflect about their actions and their values. What happened to Athens? There is probably no other time in history where there was such a conscious effort to restore education and culture and to bring back the values that once made Athens the greatest city-state in the world.⁸¹

Having this historical background in mind, we must understand that Plato seeks to determine the causes that brought along the decline of Athens as well as to provide a potential solution.⁸² In the *Republic*, Plato's analysis of the downfall starts with a conversation between Socrates and Cephalus. This first conversation follows and clarifies the symbolism of the opening scene, since it also starts with allusions to *erôs* and Hades as old Cephalus reflects on the life of passions and his imminent descent to the underworld (329d-330e). Plato portrays Cephalus as

⁷⁷ Werner Wilhelm Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1945), 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁹ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 4.8.11.

⁸⁰ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:63.

⁸¹ Jaeger, *Paideia*, 5.

⁸² Plato was not alone in this endeavor. Several of his contemporaries such as Phaedo, Euclides, and Aristippus were also trying to restore Athens to its former years of glory by founding philosophical schools. See Press, *Plato: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 33.

someone that is genuinely anxious about the consequences of unjust actions. Cephalus is sincerely trying to make things right in the way that he believes is best. From oral tradition, Cephalus has learned that, given man's affections, self-discipline and moderation are key factors to living a happy and just life.⁸³ Socrates admires Cephalus' observation that it is only self-discipline and moderation that make both old age and youth manageable since unrestrained desires will make life difficult to bear either in old age or in youth (329d). What is more, Cephalus also understands that wealth does not mitigate man's yearning (330a). Yet, Cephalus is of the opinion that wealth has an important role to play if one wishes to follow one's better judgment, since he understands (quite literally) that justice is telling the truth and paying your debts (331b).

The scene with Cephalus is most interesting to us for two reasons. First, the conversation about justice does not begin in a vacuum, but it arises out of a concrete situation.⁸⁴ Philosophical discourse does not take place in an abstraction from actual experiences. Instead, philosophical discourse is a discussion about real and concrete experiences. Second, the discussion about how to live correctly arises from the fact that man is an erotic creature. For if man were not an erotic being, there would be no need to inquire into the most satisfying way to live. Thus, one must follow Plato's insights and remark that the conversation about the nature of justice starts as a conversation about man's erotic existence (329d). If man is innately drawn to light, Plato thought, man must find the best way of life that leads him out of darkness. Only a way of life that strives toward light can truly satisfy man. The old generation, represented by Cephalus, seems not to be completely oblivious of this. Undeniably, Cephalus understands man to be an erotic creature, which is essentially what prompts man to wrongdoing. He also understands that living a just life is the best way to live a satisfactory life. Nevertheless, Cephalus' assessment about life is unreflective. Cephalus had no previous need to become *conscious* about the reality of justice vis-à-vis the erotic nature of man. He does not question or understand the reasons for tradition. He follows the rules blindly as most respected men do because otherwise society would disintegrate into chaos. Cephalus is just out of habit. This becomes evident when he suggests that wealth

⁸³ In Ancient Greece, tradition was carried over orally. Oral tradition provided Greeks with knowledge of their history. The most familiar type of oral tradition was the Homeric epics. See Rosalind Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3.

⁸⁴ Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 17–18.

prevents people from cheating other people as well as it allows for due sacrifices.⁸⁵ Accordingly, a poor man could not pursue justice successfully. Here, the contrast with Socrates is evident. Socrates is poor, probably in debt, and yet also in pursuit of justice. If wealth is a factor for living a just life, how can Socrates pursue justice successfully? The issue must be further explored. But Cephalus seems to be too old and fragile to follow Socrates in this endeavor and hence his firstborn Polemarchus inherits the discussion.

Polemarchus joins the conversation so as to rescue his father's understanding of justice, which he translates as helping your friends and harming your enemies (332d). He is able to deduce such an understanding from Simonides' and Homer's poems (334b). To be sure, Polemarchus is more enlightened than his father as he immediately brings to our attention the authority of the poets. Let us explain why. When Cephalus greets Socrates, he is quick to remark that, unlike before, he has now developed a taste for speeches (328d). In other words, Cephalus has spent most of his life accumulating wealth without paying attention to his education. By contrast, Polemarchus seems to have received an education equivalent to noble young Athenians, for he is a close friend of Adeimantus. It is not by accident that they happened to be gathered at Cephalus' home. Polemarchus not only heard the epic poems, but he has had time to discuss them or, at the very least, to listen to the speeches of others. Let us not forget that Thrasymachus, a known Sophist, is present in the crowd.

Now, since Polemarchus is actually advocating for his father's position, it would be a mistake to think that he is presenting a completely different understanding of justice. The difference between Cephalus and his primogeniture is that Polemarchus' opinion is more rhetorical than experiential. Polemarchus is certainly a practical fellow; he does not talk about the moderation of desires or Hades. If Cephalus had barely any understanding of man's erotic nature, Polemarchus has none. Given that his father was just out of habit, there was no conscious appreciation of justice that was passed down to Polemarchus. He was left in a vacuum that was filled with a diluted understanding of justice as well as rhetorical justifications. We can appreciate by his intervention that Polemarchus has been already exposed to corruptive influences when he assesses that justice is good for business (333a). Thus, Polemarchus

⁸⁵ As we shall see, this is also brought up by Adeimantus, who remarks that Hellenic tradition teaches that unjust actions can be taken away for a price (364e).

represents the new generation, those who were raised by an older generation that, given its unreflective righteousness, had little to contribute to their education. The result is a generation that has reduced justice to business ethics. Polemarchus does not seem to be bothered at all with his father's concerns, namely, the moderation of desires or punishment in the afterlife. There is not even a blind respect for tradition, but rather it is attributed a value because it serves other purposes. It is unclear whether Polemarchus thinks that not acting justly can lead the city into chaos. What is clear, though, is that Polemarchus thinks that justice is good in order to profit.

Plato has now identified the first cause that brought along the collapse of Athens. The old generation has failed to properly cultivate virtue (*aretê*) in the new generation. Given that the old generation lived in times of affluence, they rarely had to exercise moderation and restraint, which turned righteousness into a habit. The result is a younger generation that is not adequately educated in matter of right and wrong, which ultimately leads them to trivialize justice. The decay from one generation to another is best illustrated in Book VIII when the *kallipolis*, the best of the four cities, succumbs precisely because of neglect in education (546d). To be sure, this is a historical portrait, for it is concerned with the state of the core values of the Hellenes. Plato seeks to show that the lack of self-awareness in the old generation has partially contributed to the deterioration of the values that once brought order to Athens. The foundations of order have been left vulnerable. This becomes evident with Thrasymachus' intervention. Yet, the scene with Polemarchus draws a picture in which justice can still be rescued with moderate effort. Even if Polemarchus' upbringing lacked in substance, he is capable of following Socrates. Thus far, the state of justice in Attica does not seem to be a lost cause given that Socrates challenges Polemarchus with one simple assumption: justice is good and hence it must produce good things (335d). Polemarchus does not contest Socrates' assumption since he still thinks that justice must be good. Given this assumption, it cannot simply be that justice is helping your friends and harming your enemies (332d). Even Homer seems to be mistaken because this description of justice reduces the just man as someone capable of deceit (334b).⁸⁶ Moreover, how are we to differentiate with all certainty friends from enemies? (334d). No, justice cannot be a function of

⁸⁶ As noted, Polemarchus' opinion exposes the state of the Hellenic values. Yet, Socrates' assessment is not simply that Polemarchus is mistaken. Socrates explicitly points out that the poets are wrong. The statement is recurrent throughout the dialogue and even the epilogue closes with direct reference to the poets. The attack on the poets is key to understanding Plato's intentions. As we shall see, Plato is not attacking poetry *per se*, but the content of the poems.

war, not even of just war. Besides, given that it is ultimately necessary to differentiate between friends from enemies, justice is an art that requires knowledge, which renders justice as matter of expertise (334b-335a). At this point of the dialogue, although Socrates does not explicitly say it yet, we can already deduce that justice must be a function of goodness and one must know how to differentiate between good and bad.

The miraculous fortune of having Socrates clarifying misunderstandings about justice is soon eclipsed by Thrasymachus' abrupt and violent interruption. He is appalled by the way Socrates is directing the conversation, for he thinks that they are all acting like idiots giving way to one another (366b). Thrasymachus does not expect such nonsense from such a distinguished crowd and especially not from Socrates (366d). Therefore, after some much needed persuasion, he proceeds to enlighten them about the essence of justice. Thrasymachus' claim about justice is well known; justice is the advantage of the stronger (338b). As Thrasymachus explains, the strength of the rulers springs from the realization that what is just is in their advantage (339d-e). Thus, good judgment is precisely achieving such a level of consciousness (348d). This is wisdom and virtue, knowing the truth about justice and acting accordingly (348d-e). In this sense, the weak are oblivious about how things truly are, because if they would learn the truth, they would soon realize that being just is not only very high-minded simplicity, but that the life of crime is better and more profitable (348c).

Plato has now identified the second source of the problem, the Sophist. During its Golden Age, Athens attracted prominent teachers because it provided good opportunities for employment, particularly for those who were good at public speaking and debate. Sophists taught mostly young statesmen, nobility, and people who could afford their wages. The Sophists were not a school of thought; they were individuals of various types in search of fame and fortune who taught music, language, history, mathematics, science, and particularly rhetoric. In general, however, they claimed to teach *aretê* (virtue or excellence).⁸⁷ Now, in order to understand the novelty of the movement, we must first understand that, in the Hellas, before the dawn of the Sophists, the state itself was considered to be the primary educational institution shaping young citizens, since there were no secondary schools or universities.⁸⁸ What these young statesmen

⁸⁷ Robert W. Wallace, "Plato's Sophists, Intellectual History after 450, and Sokrates," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Pericles*, ed. Loren J. Samons II (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 220.

⁸⁸ Francis Macdonald Cornford, *Before and after Socrates* (Cambridge: University Press, 1932), 43.

learned was the established law, a priceless heritage of ancestral, or even divine wisdom.⁸⁹ Until that time, “it had been tacitly acknowledged that those customs and laws embodied an absolute obligation, beyond dispute.”⁹⁰ It was not until the arrival of Sophists that they were first explicitly challenged. To conservative minds, especially the elder citizens, the questioning of basic assumptions presented a threat to the whole structure of society. And when Athens fell, Plato was not alone in denouncing the detrimental influence of the Sophists. However, Plato’s reasons were quite unlike the accusations that ultimately convicted Socrates, who was also suspected of being a sophist.⁹¹ Plato was not against the probing into the values of the city. On the contrary, following his teacher footsteps, Plato thought that if the young generation wanted to question and discuss the customs and the laws of the city, in essence, to question the way they were *living*, they should be allowed to do it as a means of encouraging their education. This is, for example, revealed by Socrates’ reaction after Glaucon’s and Adeimantus’ speeches (367e). Socrates is delighted with the brothers precisely because, despite their severe speeches on justice, they remain eager to hear Socrates come in its defense. Socrates is pleased with the brothers precisely because there is nothing virtuous in being just out of habit and submission.

Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle, all of whom did not have the Sophists in high esteem, provided most of what we know about them. The lack of sophistic writings has led recent scholarship to question the accuracy of these writings. Some scholars has gone as far as to accuse Plato of having “discredited two generations of some of the world’s most brilliant and innovative thinkers, largely because –like most modern philosophers– they declined to accept a transcendent reality and were aware of potential disjunctions between words and things.”⁹² Now, this is certainly fudging Plato’s concerns. Plato did not have a reactionary attitude toward the Sophists as some of his contemporaries did. Plato penetrated in the issue far deeper than any of his contemporaries, providing concrete evidence to corroborate his uneasiness. Thus, if we do not assume that Plato’s intentions are to simply distort and exaggerate their character as to champion his own views, we might end up asking correct questions. As for example, what did Plato observe

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 41.

⁹¹ Socrates is accused “of corrupting the young and of not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other new spiritual things” (*Apol.* 24b).

⁹² Wallace, “Plato’s Sophists, Intellectual History after 450, and Sokrates,” 218. Wallace considers Socrates and Plato to be among these superstar thinkers (the sophists), which prompts us to wonder whether or not he understood Plato at all. From Wallace perspective, “Plato drew decisively away from them [the sophists], into a transcendent world of Forms, proclaiming that he knew the truth and bringing his ideal Sokrates along with him.”

about the Sophists that made them one of his constant preoccupations? To start, we might notice that Plato sharply distinguishes this diverse group of individuals from the philosophers who worked before him such as Xenophanes, Heraclitus, or Parmenides.⁹³ The Sophists are not in pursuit of truth (*alêtheia*); they are in love with opinion (*doxa*). For Plato, the distinction rests in their object of *love*. This distinction is today extremely difficult to comprehend, for in modern usage, we call philosophers precisely those people whom Plato opposed. What Plato understood by opinions (*doxai*) is what we would call today theories. These theories are *constructions* of the intellect such as in John Rawls' *Theory of Justice*.⁹⁴ Plato's characters are not trying to come up with a theory of justice, namely, a value system. Neither are they trying to define justice through logical analysis as modern analytical philosophers suggest. As we shall see, Socrates and his interlocutors are trying to *discover* what justice actually *is*. The matter must receive some attention since much of the contemporary literature insists that Plato introduces theories (as in *doxai*) or that he focuses on the inconsistency of arguments in regards to logic. I find these analyses to be concerned with concepts and prepositions rather than on what they actually refer to. They believe that Socrates is advancing opinions or simply dismantling propositions for their lack of logic, which is basically what Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of doing (338d). Of course, it would be absurd to suggest that Plato had no opinions of his own or that he paid little attention to terminology, phrasing, and consistency. In fact, Plato was the most careful writer given that he understood that philosophical discourse heavily relies on adequately conveying experiences and observations. Yet, for Plato, the object of philosophy was far from being the building of theories and the analysis of prepositions. Plato understood that words and concepts refer to *things*. If these things exist, they do so independent of our thought process. Plato is, in this sense, fundamentally a realist. As Plato understood it, concepts and prepositions are important and necessary tools for philosophical discourse, but they are certainly *not* the focus of investigation. Plato makes this explicit in the *Republic* by suggesting that excessive rigidity in the choice of terms is unworthy, for what really matters is the object of investigation (533c-e).

⁹³ Following Voegelin's assumptions we will consider these thinkers as mystic-philosophers, since they are concerned with Divine order. See Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:117.

⁹⁴ Rawls' theory belongs to the social contract tradition, which assumes that justice is the result of conventions. Thus, he is concerned with a *genealogy* of justice as if justice was a human creation. See *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 11. This will be further clarified with Thrasymachus' intervention.

An attempt must be made to elucidate the philosopher's object of investigation. As described by Plato in the *Republic*, the philosopher is the one who marvels before reality (*alêtheia*), contemplates it for what really *is*, and recognizes the "one" in the "many" (475e-476b).⁹⁵ Likewise, the philosopher is a soul (*psuchê*) habituated to the contemplation (*theôria*) of all time and all being (486a). The language that Plato uses to describe the philosopher is in itself Parmenidean and the object of knowledge is what Parmenides called *being (to on)*, the one reality.⁹⁶ To this extent, the discourse (in the Foucauldian sense) to which Plato belongs is one that carries a complex and sophisticated intellectual history that dates back to Hesiod and cannot be summarized in a thesis.⁹⁷ Suffice it to say that Plato is continuing with a tradition of philosophers before him that inquired into the nature of reality, all who recognized reality to be *one* and *orderly*. These philosophers understood that there can only be *a* common order, namely, man exists in a universal order, in the *xunôn* in the Heraclitian sense.⁹⁸ It must be added that this is not simply a point of view, an opinion, or a theory about reality. This is first and foremost an *experience* that cannot be put into words. These great men literally experienced themselves living in an order (*cosmos*) that transcended their communities and traditions. They perceived the order of society as part of the embracing cosmic order. Thus, as philosophers before him, Plato developed a higher degree of *consciousness*, which is expressed in the symbolism of the dialogue. Plato became *conscious* of Being, making it his object of investigation.

Now, the pursuit for truth about Being is not an abstract investigation. On the contrary, it was an investigation concerned with direct experiences of *living* in the world.⁹⁹ When we claim that Plato is a realist, we mean that Plato's inquiry on justice (*dikaïosunê*) in the *Republic* is actually an inquiry into the reality of *order* in its most concrete sense, as it was experienced in Athens. For this reason, we can appreciate Socrates appealing to the experiences of his interlocutors. What is justice in the concreteness of our experiences? What do we see justice producing?¹⁰⁰ As we shall see, given Plato's historical context, that is, the state of affairs, these questions are extremely troublesome. Meanwhile, the point must be made that Plato never deals

⁹⁵ For Plato reality and truth are one and the same (*alêtheia*) because "truth *about* reality is subordinated to truth *as* reality." See Cushman, *Therapeia*, xviii.

⁹⁶ Parmenides, Diels-Kranz B5.

⁹⁷ The dialogue *Parmenides*, probably the most difficult of Plato's dialogues, brings to evidence the level of the discourse. For a schematic picture, see Voegelin, *Order and History*, 3:120-122.

⁹⁸ Heraclitus, Diels-Kranz B114.

⁹⁹ Note the focus is not life *per se*, but the act of living.

¹⁰⁰ This is precisely philosophical discourse, when we discuss about our experiences of being in the world.

with justice as an abstract, but in the concrete forms that justice and injustice assumed in the Hellas. The examination of Thrasymachus' position will help us shed light into the matter. Thrasymachus' intervention leaves us in a state of shock, for he is arguing with hateful passion that injustice is better than justice. The statement is scandalous enough, but the astonishment does not come from what Thrasymachus is actually saying, but from what he is actually doing. How can he address them in such a manner? There is no trace of civility in Thrasymachus. The tension is palpable. He is indeed a wild beast. Socrates is literally trembling and rightfully so, for Thrasymachus is more than a rude interlocutor. He is the *personification* of injustice itself. Thrasymachus means to offend, insult, and destroy what Socrates had accomplished, that is, persuading Polemarchus that justice is good. To begin, it is clear that Thrasymachus is not relativist, for he agrees with Socrates that virtue (*aretê*) is living in accordance to the order of things, which requires knowledge of the order and a way of life according to this knowledge (348d-e). This becomes explicitly evident when Thrasymachus dismisses Clitophon, for he (Thrasymachus) means to argue that reality is of such a nature that what is just is in the advantage of the stronger (340c).¹⁰¹ What Thrasymachus believes is that the order of things (the cosmos) is about the survival of the fittest (349c). Thrasymachus is conceiving the world solely in material terms, which fundamentally entails that all creatures alive are driven by *necessity*. What moves us, Thrasymachus argues, is strictly what keeps our bodies alive. To this extent, excellence (virtue) becomes a function of the power we exert in the world, over nature and over people, in order to gratify our bodily desires. This is what brings the greatest fulfillment. Thrasymachus' understanding of reality and hence of justice is completely *immanent*, for it necessarily reduces reality to the life of passions, nothing else exists than our desires, which can only be ordered through mutual agreements.¹⁰² Note that only an atheist understanding of reality will hold that justice is an agreement (a contract). Since the world is completely dedivinized, only a contract brings order to existence. From this perspective, justice cannot be but a contract (a convention) that benefits the weaker. And indeed, when Thrasymachus jumps into the conversation as a wild beast, he is imposing himself on the rest. He means to show, just like a tyrant would, that he is the strongest among the group and his behavior is not reproachable, but rather worthy of admiration and praise (338c).

¹⁰¹ Clitophon comes in defense of Thrasymachus arguing that justice is what the stronger thinks it is (340c).

¹⁰² Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:131.

We have summarized Thrasymachus' opinion and it must be noted that there is nothing inconsistent in it, unless one just interprets it as a collection of prepositions. What there is, however, in Thrasymachus' presentation of his opinion is *disorder*. Thrasymachus is what would be described in Ancient Greece as *polupragmôn*, a busybody, someone who denotes a striking over activity, a habit or psychological compulsion to interfere in anything and everything.¹⁰³ The noun of *polupragmôn* is *polupragmosunê*, which is treated in the dialogue as a practice that is in direct opposition to justice (*dikaïosunê*).¹⁰⁴ This can also be appreciated by the way in which it is possible for Plato to use *oikeiopragia* (the antonymous of *polupragmosunê*, meaning, minding one's own affairs) as a synonym for *dikaïosunê*.¹⁰⁵ Athenians were not unfamiliar with this usage, for in the midst of the catastrophe, before the Sicilian Expedition, when Nicias urged his fellow Athenians to cease the enlargement of the Athenian Empire, Alcibiades, indisputably conscious of the pejorative implications of *polupragmosunê*, insisted that Athens' *inactivity* would lead to its ruin.¹⁰⁶ Alcibiades maintained that the only thing that would preserve Athens greatness was to continue the process of expansion and acquisition.¹⁰⁷ "Given the position we have reached," Alcibiades argued, "we have no choice but to keep hold of present subjects and lay designs on more, because there is the danger that, if we do not rule others, others will rule us."¹⁰⁸ It could have been just as well Thrasymachus giving that speech. Note, for example, when Thrasymachus argues that the best cities will make it their business to conquer and slave other cities (351a-c). Thus, we ought not think of Thrasymachus' opinion as a theory of justice, that is, as an abstraction.¹⁰⁹ No, it was a way of being in the world, precisely the way that led Athens to its disintegration.¹¹⁰

As seen by Plato, the Sophists had a particular role to play in the corruption of Athenian society because they disseminated false *doxa*. We, moderns, are not unfamiliar with Thrasymachus' *doxa*, namely, physicalism. As presented by Thrasymachus, physicalism is an

¹⁰³ Ibid., 3:119.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew Leigh, *From Polypragmon to Curiosus: Ancient Concepts of Curious and Meddlesome Behaviour* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 37.

¹⁰⁷ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6:18.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ As understood by Plato, opinions are embodied realities that mirror the order or disorder of our souls. The conversation is about how to live in the best way, how to order your soul in the best way. We will explore this in the next section.

¹¹⁰ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 6: 15.

ideology that has its origins in the development of Ionian science of Nature in the beginning of the sixth century.¹¹¹ This science was developed by Thales and his successors at Miletus in Ionia, a Greek colony on the coast of Asia Minor. All histories of Greek philosophy start with Thales of Miletus and it is generally agreed that he arrived at something that was completely new, what we call Western science, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. The occurrence of science was only possible because gifted individuals were capable of detaching the self from the object. In other words, they differentiated themselves from the cosmos, which led them to the discovery of Nature, “an impersonal world of things, indifferent to man’s desires and existing on and for themselves.”¹¹² The arrival of science was marked by tacit denial of all things supernatural, namely, transcendent experiences previously made intelligible through myths. Ionian scientists believed that the whole of reality could be explained in natural or material terms. In other words, Ionian science assumed that the whole cosmos was natural. Anything that formerly belonged to the realm of the supernatural (that which is incalculable and of divine providence, previously consisting on everything that existed) was now incorporated into Nature. The supernatural simply disappears. Intellectuals who reached this worldview probably thought that they had disposed of Greek mythology. However, we must note that the discovery of Nature did not get rid of myths, for more acute minds found that myths were not groundless fabrications of superstition. Yet, the foundations of Greek mythology suffered an irreparable impact. As Plato notes, the values that once brought order to the Hellenes were things of the past, for the conversation takes place in the Piraeus, in the underworld (327a-b). Athenian citizens were too enlightened, as modern people are today, to believe in the poets and in the gods. It was a time of crisis, for mythical cosmogony could no longer provide an intelligible account (a *logos*) of the world. Therefore, through Thrasymachus’ brusque interruption, Plato is masterfully illustrating how mythical cosmogony, as an intelligent account of cosmos, was superseded by physicalism. The violence and aggressiveness of Thrasymachus stands for the vicious demolition of the Hellenic myths, carried on by the Sophists, who through rhetoric, had made the world intelligible exclusively through material causality. To this effect, it is our contention that Plato’s *Republic* is at its core a restoration of the deteriorated symbols of transcendence after a century of sophistic destruction, which took place after the age of Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Heraclitus.¹¹³ Plato is seeking to

¹¹¹ Cornford, *Before and after Socrates*, 5.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹³ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:117.

continue the tradition of the mystic-philosophers and the poets back to Hesiod, who experienced truth in their struggle against the unjust conventions of society.¹¹⁴ Thus, the dialogue carries the burden of intricate historical circumstances, in which Plato identifies the Sophist as the *immediate* adversary.¹¹⁵

At this point of the conversation, we can appreciate that the issue is an ontological one to the extent that the discrepancies are concerned with the truth about reality (*alêtheia*). However, in Book I the issue is not addressed as such. Socrates deviates from properly addressing Thrasymachus, whose claim is not a trivial one.¹¹⁶ If we really wish to understand what happens in the exchange between Socrates and Thrasymachus in Book I, we might refer to Socrates' last statement.

“I seem to have behaved like a glutton, snatching at every dish that passes and tasting it before properly savoring its predecessor. Before finding the answer to *our first inquiry about what justice is*, I let that go and turned to investigate whether it is a kind of vice and ignorance or a kind of wisdom and virtue. Then an argument came up about injustice being more profitable than justice, and I couldn't refrain from abandoning the previous one and following up on that. Hence the result of the discussion, as far as I'm concerned, is that I know nothing, for when I don't know what justice is, I'll hardly know whether it is a kind of virtue or not, or whether a person who has it is happy or unhappy” (354b-c).¹¹⁷

Socrates confirms that he never addressed the real issue, which leads to a seemingly trivialization of Thrasymachus' position. Thus, Book I provides no answer to the original question and Socrates remains ignorant. Precisely for this reason, Thrasymachus has not been proven wrong. As pointed out by Socrates, Book I is merely a prelude (357a). It seeks to provide the context of the problem. This problem, Plato realized, is not merely a historical one, but, as we shall see, it concerned with the drama of human existence.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ The word *immediate* is important to highlight because, as we shall see, the epilogue ends with an attack on the poets, not on the Sophists. This gives us a clue about Plato's intentions, which will be elaborated below.

¹¹⁶ A thorough analysis of this part of the dialogue is not necessary for the purpose of this thesis. Yet, it must be noted again that Socrates never intends to have an abstract conversation. Socrates always insists in exploring concrete experiences. For example, when Socrates asks Thrasymachus to clarify what he means by the stronger, he refers to Polydamus, the pancratist (338c). We must concede, nonetheless, that logical argumentation does take place particularly in this section of the dialogue. Socrates does analyze Thrasymachus' argument in this fashion precisely because Thrasymachus insists that Socrates should not be concerned with what he (Thrasymachus) believes to be reality, but with *his account* itself (349a). It is indeed a defeat in logic and not truly a victory over false *doxa*. Plato's intentions are surely to show the lack of logic in Thrasymachus' opinion, yet Plato is more than aware that because an opinion lacks soundness, it does not automatically prevent other people from adhering to it. Accordingly, Plato wrote nine more books. In addition, we must consider that an investigation requires a certain disposition that Thrasymachus did not have. Thrasymachus thinks he already *knows* what justice is.

¹¹⁷ My italics.

A Plea for Help

We have discussed, somewhat extensively, the context in which Plato wrote the *Republic*. We have also examined the two factors that he identifies as the causes for the disintegration of Athens, that is, an old generation unconscious of right and wrong and the Sophists. Now, we move to Book II, in which we will see a much more coherent defense of what Thrasymachus had to say about justice. By the end of Book I, Thrasymachus appeared to have been defeated, since Socrates is again capable of leading the conversation out of darkness by means of logic and by the exploration of concrete experiences. However, Socrates' success is merely apparent given that Glaucon and Adeimantus, Plato's brothers, are not satisfied. The brothers are both clever and spirited young men, who understand the power of Thrasymachus' position, and realize that the battle is not over. They experience an ongoing struggle that Socrates, with his previous examination, failed to appease. Socrates never really addressed the real issue; he merely charmed Thrasymachus as if he were a snake (358b). Thus, Glaucon and Adeimantus loudly and clearly pose the question anew to Socrates, for they want to know "what justice and injustice are and what power each has when it is by itself in the soul" (358b). Note that the question is again restated ontologically, in the sense that we ought to find out what justice is in reality. If justice is not about the advantage of the stronger, then what is it about? And why is it good in itself? In essence, the brothers are urging Socrates to provide an alternative *logos* of reality, for only a different *logos* can truly defeat Thrasymachus and cast light on our existence. For this reason, the brothers wish to clarify Thrasymachus' position, especially the force of his argument and to give Socrates a better understanding of what he is actually up against.

In a more articulated manner, the speeches of Plato's brothers simply restate Thrasymachus' case, for the speeches follow the logic of Thrasymachus' argument, and hence there is nothing that was not said before. Therefore, Plato's intentions are really to dissect Thrasymachus' position by dividing the foundations of his account in two, given that there are two speeches that Socrates will have to address. The first speech, Glaucon's, deals with the main Hellenic opinions about justice and the order of things, whilst the second speech, Adeimantus', deals with the sources of these opinions. Glaucon's speech is wonderful inasmuch as it shows the concreteness of Plato's thought and directs us toward the object of the dialogue. As Glaucon reminds us, the inquiry about focuses on "a way of life based on the *truth* about things and not

living in accordance with opinion” (362a).¹¹⁸ Note that, for Plato, opinions are not taken to be abstractions, but rather a way of living. In this sense, opinions are not disembodied. As we shall see, they actually mirror the order or disorder of our souls. Today, we would say that they echo our psychological state. But the comparison does not do justice to the Ancient Greeks because they were not moderns. They understood that wellbeing (*eudaimonia*) was a function of truth. Remember that both Socrates and Thrasymachus agreed that *aretê* was living according to *alêtheia*, which involves knowledge of reality and action in accordance with this knowledge (348d-e). Both treat *aretê* as a function of reality, that is, one is virtuous if, and only if, one lives according to the order of things. The word *aretê* itself carries that connotation, which is not captured by our notion of virtue.¹¹⁹ For ancient Greeks, virtue is a quality or the state that makes something good or excellent according to its *being*.¹²⁰ What is more, *aretê* is not restricted to human beings. For example, in the dialogue, Socrates asks about the virtue of horses and dogs (335b). If something is a horse, its *aretê* as a horse is that state or quality that makes it a good horse, namely, endurance, calmness and so on. It might be a bit difficult for us, moderns to comprehend this notion because, nowadays, we conceive different cultures to have different systems of valuation (moral principles) in which one excels by following the rules thoroughly. Nonetheless, we must acknowledge that for ancient Greeks this was not simply matter of evaluation, but a matter of what actually makes something good according to its being. In this light, the inquiry about what justice is and about its power in the soul is directly concerned with whether or not man *is* such a being whose *aretê* is justice, that is, whether or not justice is a quality or state that makes man a good man. Put differently, what kind of creatures are human beings? Are they creatures purely driven by necessity as Thrasymachus argues? Thus, as Glaucon observes, the discussion is truly about reality (*alêtheia*), strictly speaking, about the order of things, including the nature of man and *not* about political or ethical concepts, ideas or opinions.

¹¹⁸ My italics.

¹¹⁹ We associate virtue we moral excellence, goodness, righteousness as well as good sexual behavior. See Oxford Dictionaries, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹²⁰ See G.M.A. Grube’s translation of the *Republic* Plato, “The Republic,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997), II – fn.8.

Glaucon starts his speech by offering a *genealogy* of justice. The fact of nature (*phusis*), Glaucon states, is that doing wrong is good and being harmed is bad (358e).¹²¹ However, the misfortunes of being harmed outweigh the benefits of doing wrong. This is precisely why it is better to enter a contract, which would involve a compromise between the best case scenario, doing wrong and getting away with it, and the worst case scenario, being harmed and being unable to retaliate (359a). The agreement is the origin and the essence of justice (359b). Second, Glaucon continues, we know that our true desire is to outdo others and get more and more, which anyone's nature naturally regards as good and strives for. However, nature is forced by convention to deviate from the natural way of things into respecting fairness (359c). Therefore, if you can avoid the contract, if you have the power to do so as a god, like Gyges with his ring, then you will be happier and profit the most (559d). To this extent, justice is never freely chosen (360c). Finally, and most importantly, it is only the appearance of justice that suffices, for it prevents harm and allows one to profit the most (362c).

Glaucon's speech brings us to an important distinction between a discovery and a genealogy. The quest of the dialogue is the discovery of justice, which ultimately leads Socrates and his interlocutors to the vision of the Good. In the classical sense, something is a discovery because its existence is independent of human belief or human making. For example, a thing that is found in nature (*phusis*) can be discovered. By contrast, when something is not independent of human activity, it cannot be discovered. Now, when Glaucon uses the word *phusis* in this passage, he does not mean "in nature." Given that Glaucon is arguing that justice is a convention, *phusis* simple means *originally*. In other words, Glaucon is not talking about the nature of justice because he is arguing that justice is the result of human activity. When justice is taken to be a convention, it cannot be discovered. Hence, Glaucon traces the origin of justice (genealogy). To this effect, we talk of a genealogy of justice only when it is taken as the result of human customs. Consider, for example, Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. It is important to note this because we must acknowledge that Glaucon is engaging in an intellectual debate about Nature, and hence, reality. Glaucon is putting forward an argument that arose as an outcome of Ionian science. Realizing what prompts Glaucon's speech frees us from the overwhelming confusion about the subject of the dialogue, which is certainly not a theory of the nature of justice. The moment we

¹²¹ By nature, the Greeks understood what does not owe its existence and power to human belief, making, or convention. It is in opposition to *nomos* (written or unwritten law or custom) and *technê* (art or craft). See Thomas L. Pangle translation, *The Laws of Plato* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), I - fn. 12.

think that the dialogue deals with theories about justice, it is the moment we have started misinterpreting the dialogue. Again, as Glaucon notes, the debate is about what is real and who lives according to the order of things.

Once Glaucon has dealt with the most popular opinions about justice, Adeimantus joins the conversation because “the most important thing [in defense of Thrasymachus’ position] has not been said yet” (362d). Adeimantus addresses the sources of these opinions, namely parents, the poets and spiritual authorities. To begin with, fathers tell their sons about the importance of justice for the benefits of having a good reputation. Consequently, fathers praise the appearance of justice, rather than justice itself, for it is merely the appearance that brings the rewards (363a). It is true that the poets Hesiod and Homer praise justice, but they mostly speak of the rewards and punishments in the afterlife (363e). Yet, we all know that the gods also assign misfortunes to righteous people (364b). What is more, the appearance of justice also fools the gods as beggar-priests and soothsayer say they can take wrongdoings away for a cost (364e). An intelligent person will soon realize that the life one ought to live, if one is to be happy, is to build a façade of illusory virtue and to form secret societies and political clubs under the instruction of rhetoricians who will help one succeed (365c-d). Finally, one ought not to be concerned with the gods, for either there are no gods or they do not bother with us. If the gods do exist, then one just needs to listen to the poets and learn to influence the gods through sacrifices (365e). For these reasons, Adeimantus concludes that no one chooses justice willingly, for injustice is more profitable and brings the most happiness in this world and in the next (366b).

Adeimantus’ speech is insightful insofar as it is a historical portrait that schematically illustrates the dreadful deterioration of the Hellenic values. The arrival of the younger Sophists surely exacerbated the situation, yet, as explained by Adeimantus, traditional educators – parents, the poets and spiritual authorities – also professed an understanding of justice that corroborated Thrasymachus’ account. In other words, the moral predicament was embedded in society previous to the coming of the Sophists. This is precisely why Socrates points out to Polemarchus that Homer must be mistaken (334b). Moreover, as Adeimantus magnificently exposes, the perversion expresses itself in man’s understanding of the gods. Man is such a nonentity that he announces the nonexistence of the gods, or he projects his own corrupted existence upon the

gods, who are easily persuaded by prayer and sacrifice.¹²² To this extent, Plato's brothers provide Socrates, and the readers, with an extraordinary compilation of life experiences, since the characters speak from their own experiential life and, when addressing Socrates, they do so by alluding to Socrates' own experiences (357c). To be sure, they remain characters of a philosophical work and hence the experience belongs to Plato himself. Through the voice of his brothers, Plato is articulating what he must have felt as a young man lost in the chaos and corruption of the Athenian society. For a young man who truly cared for a life of excellence (*aretê*), the popular opinions of the time, as well as their sources, must have generated an overwhelming confusion. Yet, there was one man whose unflinching righteousness left little doubt about the existence of virtue. As his brothers in the dialogue, young Plato must have recognized the truth in Socrates' integrity, since he lived according to the conviction that justice is "to be valued by anyone who wants to be happy, both for itself and for its consequences" (358a). Of course, given the state of affairs in Athens, Socrates probably struck most of his peers in the same way he struck Thrasymachus, as absurd, ridiculous, and even mad. But Plato and his brothers were not just any Athenians; they were the sons of Ariston, godlike children of an eminent man (368a). They certainly recognize Socrates as their rescuer as they explicitly ask his guidance toward the truth of the matter (358d; 366e; 368c). Therefore, what Glaucon and Adeimantus really represent is a plea for help from a soul struggling with, resisting, and refusing to accept unjust opinions and conventions. If we are to trust the symbolism of the *Republic*, encountering the astonishing intellect and colossal integrity of the man Socrates was, for Plato, a sublime experience and his lifelong inquiry regarding the order of Being is largely due to this encounter.

We will never know if young Plato actually asked Socrates to provide him with an alternative *logos* that could defeat the destructive influence of the Sophists. We can only assume that the matter deeply troubled him, especially after the condemnation of his teacher. Socrates' death must have certainly left Plato in such a state of shock and dread that he most certainly felt the need to explain what had happened. For Plato, it must have been a question of whether the execution of *aretê* in the person of Socrates was a permanent state of social affairs or was it that the moral obliquity of mankind, and its effects in society, was unavoidable. Though distressed,

¹²² Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 72. This is particularly interesting for us, moderns, who have also declared the death of God.

Plato must have surely realized that the decline of Athens, as well as Socrates' death, was largely due to the fact that Thrasymachus' opinion (*doxa*) was sedimented in society (493a).¹²³ To this effect, Plato unveiled what Voegelin refers as the doxic state of the soul.¹²⁴ In modern times, it is particularly problematic explaining what this condition consists of because, as we shall see, we too suffer from the same disease. Modern man does not know who he is and what he wants, and as such, he has also lost the ability to distinguish between reality and opinion, for everything is now a matter of evaluation.¹²⁵ Yet, if we think that Plato is providing a theory (in the modern sense of the word) of justice, we have automatically fallen into the trap of the Sophist. We must start by recognizing that Plato is not dealing with opinions. Plato is describing *phenomena* (ways of lives) that led him to his *epistêmê*. To understand this, we might refer to the way Plato describes the condition, the doxic state, as a disease of the soul. The soul is sick because its constitution is disordered, and such a disorder prevents the soul from seeing how things in reality truly are.¹²⁶ Plato approached the disintegration of Athens as a physician, as someone who could provide a clinical picture (*eidos*). In fact, the *Republic* is flooded with medical terms such as *eidos* or *idea*, which refer to the combination of symptoms that characterize an illness.¹²⁷ The medical terminology suggests an empirical search for characteristics, in addition to combinations of characteristics, that are regarded as essential from the constancy of their occurrence in things perceivable under observation.¹²⁸ What Plato observed, empirically, is that most individuals attune their souls to the order of the city (*politeia*), that is, most people conform to their city's mainstream opinions and habits. Plato also realized that following the order of the city does not have to be disastrous, since a city can be just and it can respect people's humanity.¹²⁹ But as observed by Plato, in times of Socrates, Athens was not such a city and its conventions conflicted with the order of things, particularly with the morphology of the human soul. As such, Plato

¹²³ As Allan Bloom points out, Thrasymachus' opinion is really the same as the city's and, thus, he acts as its representative. See his interpretative essay in Bloom, *The Republic Of Plato*, 326.

¹²⁴ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:129.

¹²⁵ Since we live in times of idealism, we find things to be subjective in the strict sense of the word. We construct our own little worlds and we ultimately do not exist in the same reality. See Leo Strauss' essay "The Three Ways of Modernity" in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays* (Wayne State University Press, 1989).

¹²⁶ As we shall see, the proper order of the soul is the main theme of the dialogue.

¹²⁷ The terminology was initially developed by the Ionian physicians of the fifth century B.C. Thucydides also used the terminology in his study of the Peloponnesian War to describe the disease of a society. Because a diagnosis implies that a thing has a normal state or a healthy state, it is not surprising that Plato adopted the useful vocabulary. See Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction*, 16–17; Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, ed. Dante Germino, vol. 2 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 425–432; Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:148.

¹²⁸ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:148.

¹²⁹ According to Plato's diagnosis, Athens in times of Solon was a good *polis* (599e).

became aware that only a sick soul would believe that the origin of justice is the product of utilitarian calculus. In this sense, as far as Plato is concerned, Thrasymachus is not providing a theory or definition of justice, but rather he is exposing the doxic state of his soul, that is, the disorder in it. What is more, Plato must have arrived at the conclusion that a single doxic state of the soul is not essentially dangerous to the wellbeing of individuals and the community, but a mass corrupt society is extremely dangerous, for it is the greatest of all Sophists perpetuating the doxic state of the soul through social pressure.¹³⁰ To this effect, Glaucon's and Adeimantus' speeches also spotlight the social pressure to join in the *doxa*. The experience of social pressure is also portrayed in the prelude, when Polemarchus urges Socrates to give in and join them since Socrates was outnumbered (327c). Plato must have also felt pressure to give in, an experience that he could only describe as a disease forcing itself upon him. As his brothers did in the dialogue, Plato must have felt that the Athenian society was destroying his soul and, because of his own resistance, Plato deemed the phenomena to be an illness. Thus, by noticing the proliferation of the disease throughout the city, Plato arrived to the insight that the essence of society is psyche (*phuchê*).¹³¹ In other words, Plato realized that the corruption of society is the corruption of the psyche of its members. The disorder of Athens was a disorder in the soul of its citizens. Plato expresses his insight by having Socrates state that city is the soul written large (368d-e).

The Soul Written Large

When Plato's brothers restate the question ontologically, it becomes evident that the purpose of the dialogue is to inquire into the reality of order, specifically order in human existence. Given that Plato conceived human affairs as primarily political affairs, any discussion about order in human existence was naturally a discussion about political order.¹³² To this effect, it is necessary to remark that Plato's insight, that the city is the soul written large, is not a metaphor or an analogy *per se*, but rather it is taken to be a crucial insight about man's social existence. To be

¹³⁰ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:135.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 3:124.

¹³² Plato perceived private and political affairs to be intimately intertwined. We can say that Plato had a very good understating of the person, but he did not conceive it as an individual, as we do in our modern world.

sure, Plato speaks of this insight metaphorically and discursively, without attributing it a technical name. But a proper analysis of the dialogue understands it as an anthropological principle.¹³³ As portrayed in the dialogue, Plato understood that all cultural practices, everything that belongs to the realm of the human, are manifestations of the human soul and hence they express its state, that is, its order or dynamics. This becomes particularly evident in the way Plato uses the term *politeia*, the way in which a *polis* is run, for both the order of the soul and the order of the *polis*. *Politeia* can be translated as a form of government, a constitution, or a regime. Yet, the way in which Plato uses it denotes dynamics of order, rather than political systems or governmental institutions. As Leo Strauss points out, it really refers to the way of life of the *polis*, namely, the political order.¹³⁴ The *politeia* emanates from the soul that *animates*. Thus, it is not simply metaphorically that Plato uses the analogy. Put differently, Plato did not understand the study of politics as the study of institutions and political systems, but rather as an inquiry into the psychological state of affairs. Plato understood that forms of government are dead skeletons when they are studied without regard of the *animating* soul. To this effect, the goodness of a *polis* is determined not by the institutions or political systems, but by how the *polis* is run (*politeia*). Likewise, a person is good not because he is in excellent physical condition, but because of the *politeia* of his soul. From this understanding, good order cannot be created through institutional devices. On the contrary, relying on institutions and laws is a symptom of a diseased *polis*, for its members have not established the good *politeia* in their souls. A healthy *polis* has the least amount of legislation, for its people do not need to be told constantly what to do and what not to do, but their ways of life are in accordance with the order found in their souls (426c-e).¹³⁵

The paramount role of the *psuchê* in Plato's thought indicates that politics is, for Plato, a matter of ethics. The intimate relation between politics and ethics is, of course, not exclusive to Plato, but it applies generally to Greek political thought.¹³⁶ In the *Republic*, Plato explores the soul precisely because it concerns the political community. To this effect, we might be tempted to regard Plato's dialogue as a work on human psychology, which is partially correct, except that

¹³³ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:140.

¹³⁴ Leo Strauss, *Leo Strauss On Plato's Symposium*, ed. Seth Benardete (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2003), 9.

¹³⁵ As we shall see, this is the reason why the luxurious city had to be put under so much restraint.

¹³⁶ See the introductory section to Ryan K. Balot, *Greek Political Thought* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).

Plato is not trying to immanentize the experience.¹³⁷ The search for the transcendent source of order is real in Plato, particularly because the *psuchê* is conceived to be akin with the Divine.¹³⁸ This conception of the *psuchê*, as an immortal entity that gives life, is related to the origins of Western thinking. This type of thinking developed gradually from a simpler to a more complex understanding of man and the world by focusing upon that which is constant and unconditioned, by focusing upon truth.¹³⁹ We have no other way of thinking, for our thought processes belong to this order and, for this very reason, we fail to understand that this type of thinking is until today the greatest of all revolutions. In the mystery of existence, the Greeks recognized the only tool available to man that illuminates being; the Greeks discovered the human mind. Man's cognizance of himself – the discovery of the self – is man's greatest achievement. We cannot even imagine not having a self, and yet, we know that before the Ancient Greeks, human beings existed in a different order; they existed unconscious of their being.¹⁴⁰

To be sure, the discovery of the mind was a gradual development. This drama, man rising to an understanding of himself, is revealed to us in all cultural practices such as rituals, literature, sciences and philosophy. We can see, for example, a clear transition in the heroes of the *Iliad*, who are no longer playthings of irrational forces; there is a well-ordered and meaningful world directed by the Olympian gods.¹⁴¹ Supernatural experiences as well as the origin of the universe are represented and explained through a comprehensive mythical cosmogony. The gods represent the internal and external forces experience by the mind, which had previously remained obscured or unaccounted for. Yet, the way in which the Homeric heroes understand themselves is worlds apart from the way in which Plato's characters understand themselves. Homeric characters experience emotions not only from within, but emotions also have their origin from the outside

¹³⁷ This point cannot be stressed enough. In fact, when translating the word *phuchê*, we must be aware that our notions of mind and psyche do not fully capture the transcendent implications it carried for the Ancient Greeks. It is preferable to translate it as soul, although the latter can potentially undermine the concreteness of Plato's thought for less philosophical sensitive scholars.

¹³⁸ Note that the search for a transcendent source of order needs not to be in contradiction with the concreteness of Plato's thought. We shall go back to this point below when looking at Plato's exploration of the human soul.

¹³⁹ Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind: In Greek Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Dover Publications, 2011), v.

¹⁴⁰ The shift from cosmocentrism to anthropocentrism is a widely accepted assumption. See the introductory section to Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, ed. Dante Germino, vol. 1 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000). See also Cornelius Loew, *Myth, Sacred History, and Philosophy: The Pre-Christian Heritage of the West*, 1st ed. (Harcourt Brace & World, 1967).

¹⁴¹ Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind: In Greek Philosophy and Literature*, 22.

world; emotions are sent by the gods.¹⁴² Consider, how emotions arise in the *Iliad*. For example, In Book X, when “Athena, eyes blazing, breathed fury in Diomedes and he went whirling into the slaughter” swinging his sword against the Trojans.¹⁴³ This is not merely a cultural difference, but it is a completely different way of being in the world. In Homer, the word *psuchê* does not designate the totality of the mind as we find in Plato, that is, there is no psychic whole.¹⁴⁴ The *psuchê* of the Homeric heroes is merely the breath of air that left the body at the moment of death.¹⁴⁵ Likewise, the *thumos* and *nous* appear to be more like independent organs such as the heart or the liver, each serving as the seat of (e)motion and vision respectably.¹⁴⁶ Since the *psuchê* is not responsible for the animation of the body, there is no “body” to animate. Of course, Homeric Greeks were human beings just like us. The point to be made is that they had no conception of the body. They did use the word *sôma*, which later in the fifth century will be understood as body, but, in the *Iliad*, it simply means corpse.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, the *psuchê* is not an immortal entity with an afterlife. Both the *nous* and *thumos* die with the heroes that embodied them. The conception of the animating soul, the immortal soul or the eschatological soul, is first presumed in the thinkers of the generation of 500 B.C. It is particularly apparent in Heraclitus, who consciously explores the depth of this soul.¹⁴⁸ As Plato, Heraclitus not only recognizes the body as a complete whole, but he also endows the soul with qualities that differ fundamentally from those of the body.¹⁴⁹ For the purpose of this thesis, we do not need to go into the details of Heraclitus’ thought. What is important to acknowledge is that these qualities attributed to the soul signify a more conscious understanding of the human mind, which, with all certitude, is alien to Homer.

Now, if we consider Plato’s intellectual background, the symbolism of the dialogue as well as the drama, it is not audacious to suggest that Plato is not simply recognizing the soul and the body as different entities, but he is consciously joining Heraclitus in the exploration of the animating soul. Since it must be determined whether or not the nature of the soul is such that

¹⁴² Barbara Koziak, *Retrieving Political Emotion: “Thumos,” Aristotle, and Gender* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 54.

¹⁴³ Homer, *The Iliad*, ed. Bernard Knox, trans. Robert Fagles, Reissue edition (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Penguin Classics, 1998), ln. 556–560.

¹⁴⁴ Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind: In Greek Philosophy and Literature*, 14.

¹⁴⁵ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 2:293.

¹⁴⁶ Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind: In Greek Philosophy and Literature*, 14–15.

¹⁴⁷ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 2:293–294.

¹⁴⁸ Heraclitus, Diels-Kranz B45.

¹⁴⁹ Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind: In Greek Philosophy and Literature*, 17.

justice is its *aretê*, the inquiry about justice reveals itself as an inquiry into the *psuchê*.¹⁵⁰ The symbols of night and day, darkness and light, descent and ascent, exemplify the movement of the soul toward a greater understanding of his being. The drama of dialogue is precisely the drama of man's gradual understating of himself. As we shall see, Plato explores the morphology of the soul as to gain knowledge about man. For this reason, the inquiry is a *cognitive* inquiry that aims at educating the soul in a manner that is established in it a *politeia* with its best element as its ruler (590e-591a). The *politeia* within one's self is not simply a metaphor, but a new existential meaning, for man will take active part in the politics of this city (592a). Glaucon recognizes, "you mean that he will be willing to take part in the politics of the city we were founding and describing, the one that exists in theory [*en logois*], for I do not think it exists anywhere on earth" (592a). And Socrates explains, "but perhaps there is a model of it in heaven [*en ourano*], for anyone who wants to look at it and to make himself its citizen on the strength of what he sees. It makes no difference whether it is or ever will be somewhere, for he would take part in the practical affairs of that city and no other" (592b).¹⁵¹ From metaphor to reality, man is a *polis* and his *politeia* must be ordered by looking at the transcendent source of order.

The Investigation of the Dialogue

The search for the transcendent source of order is real in Plato. Yet, we should not make the mistake to read Plato as if he were not a concrete thinker. To arrive at his insights, Plato never goes beyond observation. Plato's enterprise is not what we might refer as scientific today. However, the spirit driving Plato is scientific to the extent that he seeks to acquire knowledge and understanding about the *psuchê* and, hence about social existence, through experience, thought, and the senses.¹⁵² For this reason, the inquiry into the soul of man is an *investigation*, namely, Socrates and his interlocutors set themselves on a journey to *discover* whether or not justice is its *aretê* (368c). The investigation adopts Plato's insight, that the city is the soul written large, as the

¹⁵⁰ We have previously discussed that the term *aretê* as a quality or state that makes something excellent according to what the thing is.

¹⁵¹ The "perhaps" in this sentence is important. There is no certitude of the Transcendent, we can only hope.

¹⁵² Given the anthropological principle, a study about the *psuchê* is a study about man's social existence. See previous section.

underlying assumption.¹⁵³ Under the guidance of this assumption, the procedure is to find and explore justice in a city in order to compare it to an individual. Given that the order of the city mirrors the order of the soul, justice in the city and justice in the soul should be alike (368d-369a). Again, the procedure corresponds with the previous argument that the assumption is not merely a metaphor.

The first step of the inquiry is to observe in theory the birth of *a* city with the purpose of uncovering how justice and injustice appear in it. The investigation goes through different phases corresponding to the different stages the city will go through. We can say that the dialogue deals with different cities as long as we understand that there is continuity. One city is built on top of the other one. The phases of the investigation are as follows:¹⁵⁴

- a) The founding of the city and the establishment of order (369b-445)
- b) The embodiment of the vision of the Good (449a-541b)
- c) The decay of the city (543a-576b)
- d) The result of the investigation (576b-592b)

The first phase of the investigation is the founding of a city. This phase is a theoretical examination that seeks to explore, by means of thought, how political organizations come to be. Note that Plato is not imagining man in the state of nature as modern philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke do. Plato is simply reconstructing how a community emerges as thousands of them have emerged in the history of humanity. First, Socrates looks at how the city would meet its basic needs. Human settlements start because human beings are not self-sufficient; they need one another to meet all their basic needs (369b-c). The implemented procedure is comparable to the procedure an anthropologist would use to determine how a specific city originated. This is particularly significant to us, because although the city is being built in thought, Plato's procedure is an attempt to recreate a concrete reality, that is, Plato's thought is not detached from perceptible phenomena. Likewise, Socrates and his interlocutors will act as the founders of the city as so frequently in the history of the Hellas statesmen drafted constitutions for new

¹⁵³ This assumption must be understood as an anthropological principle; it is man who is under investigation.

¹⁵⁴ I have constructed this outline of the investigation based on Eric Voegelin's schema of the organization of the *Republic*. See *Order and History*, 2000, 3:100–101.

colonies.¹⁵⁵ Socrates is the designated *oikistês*, someone who is chosen as leader and given the power of selecting a settling place and directing the preliminary labors of the colonists.¹⁵⁶ Socrates reckons that the best way all necessities could be met is by recognizing that human beings are not all born alike, but each differs somewhat in nature from the others, one being suited to one task, another to another (370a). By developing the differences among men into skills, a community of men can deal with the necessities of life in a more satisfactory manner. Likewise, by arranging the different skills into a satisfactory whole, the city displays most modes of human existence.

Socrates calls this first city true (*alêthinê*) and healthy (*hugiês*) because it pays attention to the natural differences of men and arranges them accordingly (372e). Justice, the ordering principle, is attention to the business for which a man is particularly talented by nature.¹⁵⁷ In turn, injustice is interfering in things that are by nature another man's specific chore, since meddling in someone else's business reduces the efficiency of the order and ultimately disrupts it. The end result is a primitive community of free peasants, craftsmen, and small traders, who are neither rich nor poor, exercising birth control as to avoid poverty and war (372a-b). Members of this community live modest lives in peace and good health (372c).

While the primitive city has a *politeia* by nature, not all men will be satisfied by it. Addressing merely the necessities of life and enjoying simple pleasures will not do for Glaucon, who is more repelled than charmed by the true *politeia*. Glaucon rejects the true order because he will not have his existence reduced to a peasant life. For Glaucon, and presumably for Adeimantus too, it is a city for pigs (372d). To be sure, the brothers are in pursuit of *aretê*, yet they cannot imagine a pursuit that excludes evenings like the one they are enjoying at the present, as guests of a rich host, in a marvelous house with comfortable furniture, in the company of Socrates, absorbed in philosophical discourse (450b). They want a city that allows for their full development, for some men will want more than merely addressing the necessities of life and simple pleasures. The mode of existence expressed in the character of Glaucon cannot exist in this primitive *polis* without disrupting its order. The true city cannot accommodate men like the

¹⁵⁵ Matthew Dillon and Lynda Garland, *Ancient Greece: Social and Historical Documents from Archaic Times to the Death of Alexander*, 3rd ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 1–2.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4–6.

¹⁵⁷ Note that the ordering principle will be later developed into the virtue of justice, for both the city and the soul of man.

brothers, and hence, Socrates, instead of dismissing Glaucon, is quick at recognizing that the true city excludes some forces of human nature. We can rightly wonder whether the true city has room for the statesman and the philosopher. Can politics and philosophy prosper without the amenities of civilization?

The striving of Glaucon and Adeimantus will convert the healthy city into an opulent city with unnecessary arts, composed of actors, dancers, nurses, tutors, and servants. The city will have a much larger territory to accommodate its new inhabitants. The city will also partake in war, for it might need to expand as to acquire necessary supplies (373e). Socrates calls this new city luxurious (*truphōsa*) and feverish (*phlegmainousa*), tacitly suggesting that the city is sick (372e-373a). Now, the city is not sick because it is luxurious, but because it is founded in a paradox. The city requires both high-spirited (*thumoeides*) and naturally philosophical (*philosophos phusis*) guardians in order to protect it from external threats (375a-e). Yet, by virtue of their specialization in the art of war, these guardians also have the potential to bring about the fall of the city. The guardians have the abilities to slave their fellow citizens, thus becoming their masters, rather than protecting them from invaders. Thus, the city needs guardians for protection, but what protects the city from the guardians? The city could be torn apart by *internal* forces, specifically those forces that was trying to accommodate in the first place. The paradox is extraordinary because it is meant to illustrate conflicts in society rising from the configuration of the psyche. Plato shows his genius not simply as a psychologist, but as a social scientist.

The inherent instability of the luxurious city will require a restraining force that will put the guardians under control. Socrates himself is the force that will cure the city and restore order (stability) in the *polis* through the education (*paideia*) of the guardians. Since the guardians must specialize in war, their education must be one that overcomes the paradox on which the luxurious city was founded. The education proposed by Socrates follows the patterns of traditional education, that is, the body is trained through gymnastics and the soul through music (376e). Yet, it does not mean to simply follow tradition, for it also consists in an expurgation of traditions, starting with a theological revision. Here Socrates will address Adeimantus' concerns, which highlight the moral predicament that was embedded in traditions (362d-366b). First, poets must represent the gods as they are (379a). Gods are only responsible for good things (379c, 380c). Gods are also true in words and in deeds (382e). The terrors of Hades are false (386a-b). Gods, demi-gods, and heroes do not lament their fates, for, unlike human beings, they are self-sufficient

(387c-d). Likewise, gods and divine creatures have their bodily desires under control, that is, the pleasures of drinking, sex, and food (389d).

The theological revision is also accompanied by a selective musical education and a rigorous physical training that will harmonize the both natures (the high-spirited and the naturally philosophical) as to overcome the paradox (410e). The guardians cannot be exposed to material possessions and hence they will enjoy a communal life (416d-417b). The guardians shall possess everything in common, including “marriages, the having of wives, and the procreation of children” (423e-424a). The task of the guardians is to ensure that wealth and poverty do not spread in the city, since it prevents people from minding their own business (422a). The guardians must also prevent the city from expanding beyond the necessary (423c). This city, which has now being purified through the influence of Socrates, is called good (*agathê*) and right (*orthê*). Just like the primitive city, this newly purified city is once again organized by the same ordering principle (433a; 443c). Justice is doing one’s own work and not meddling with what is not one’s own.

We should avoid being fixated on the provisions for the good city. To start, the provisions are conditional to the circumstances of the city and, hence, it would be a mistake to take them as a recipe for a good constitution.¹⁵⁸ Of course, there are reasons for discussing the provisions, especially if one wishes to discuss the historical circumstances that prompted. However, far more interesting is the theological revision, which appears to be at the center of Plato’s concerns.¹⁵⁹ In the first phase of the investigation, in the transition between the luxurious city and the good city, the tension between philosophy and mythical cosmogony is palpable. First, when compared to philosophical inquiry, mythical cosmogony loses its explanatory strength. Philosophy provides a more intelligent account (*logos*) about the order of existence than, for example, the Homeric epics. We have already discussed how the Olympian gods represent a well-ordered cosmos. Yet, the capriciousness of their characters does not properly represent Nature, the object of science. In this light, Plato’s attack on Homer and on the poets emerges as a conscious struggle against misrepresentations and wrong symbolizations of reality. Plato is not simply joining Heraclitus in

¹⁵⁸ We will briefly explore the nature of the provisions below.

¹⁵⁹ As we shall see, Plato is not really concerned with implementing his provisions. He was more than aware of the historical circumstances that prevented him from executing them.

his exploration of the soul, but also in his critic of the poets.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the Socratic education starts with a theology in which the gods become predictable and in harmony with the discoveries of Ionian science, that is, with the knowledge acquired through the study of Nature. They will no longer interfere at random and they are essentially not responsible for the fate of man. Most importantly, their divinity is defined by their lack of *erôs*, for they are self-sufficient and do not yearn. Plato is not removing the Olympian gods from the cosmos, but to be sure, their nature does not belong to the erotic world of Becoming. Self-sufficiency has no place in the ever-changing temporal order of the cosmos.

Furthermore, philosophy is not simply superior in comparison to mythical cosmogony in accounts of its explanatory power, but given the state of affairs, it is indispensable. The language of the myth has become inaccessible, particularly to the minds of enlightened fundamentalists, who interpret the imaginative symbolization of divine forces literally, that is, as a collection of realistic, yet incredible, stories about the gods.¹⁶¹ Physicalism is characterized by a flatness of understanding. Symbols are no longer taken to be representation of experiences, but rather as the actual objects. For example, Zeus is no longer considered to be the symbol of ultimate divine order in the cosmos, but as the actual divine creature that rules the other deities. To this effect, Homer and Hesiod must be stopped, but not on the accounts against myth and poetry *per se*, for Plato himself makes use of them masterfully. Myths and poets ought to tell *true* stories about the order of existence (377d). The Phoenician Tale, a story about the unity of men through a universal humanity, is precisely such a type of truthful myth. The tale as a whole is untrue (*pseudos*), but the equality of men is true (*alêthês*) (377a). The differences between men are dreams (*oneirata*), whilst the reality (*alêtheia*) is their universal humanity (414d). Purposely evoking Hesiod and his metal ages, the myth also draws attention to the methodological question whether the truth disclosed by the *mythos* could be delivered by any other means at all.¹⁶² The truth about the equality of men is inexplicable and impenetrable to rational analysis.

Once the good city has been founded and justice has been discovered to be the same principle on which the primitive city was founded, Socrates moves to complete the final part of the investigation, that is, to compare the good city with an individual (435d). Since the city is

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, Diels-Kranz B42, B56, and B57. The same can be observed in Xenophanes. See Diels-Kranz B15 and B16.

¹⁶¹ Consider, for example, Xenophanes's critique of anthropomorphic god. See Diels-Kranz B15.

¹⁶² Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:160.

composed of three classes (guardians, auxiliaries, and the people), the same three classes should be found within the soul of man. Socrates identifies three forces in the soul, the appetitive (*epithumêtikon*) (437d), the rational (*logistikon*) (439d), and the spirited (*thumoeides*) (440b). The identification is based on the function and object of love of each element (441a). The *epithumêtikon* is connected to the body in a relation of survival, indulgence, and pleasure (439d), which makes it its function the survival and wellbeing of the body (559b). Being in love with wisdom (581b), the *logistikon* allows man to learn and understand (580d). What is more, the *logistikon* has the capacity to know what is actually good for the *whole* soul (586d-e). However, even if the *logistikon* knows what is best for the whole, it does not and cannot operate by itself. The *logistikon* needs the assistance of the *thumos*, the element of the soul that strives for victory and honor (581b), as to allow for spirited actions (580d). Now, since the all the elements of the soul are lovers of something, it renders the whole soul as erotic. Order in the soul would mean the harmonization of the different erotic forces in correct super- and subordination. A well-ordered soul must displayed the same *politeia* as in the good city, namely, the erotic forces of the soul must stand to one another in a hierarchical relation with the rational element as the ruler. If this is so, each force corresponds to a type of virtue, that is, moderation (*sôphrosunê*), wisdom (*sophia*), and courage (*andreia*), respectively.¹⁶³ Justice (*dikaïosunê*) is the main principle that harmonizes all the erotic forces of the soul and synchs them in friendship (442c-d).¹⁶⁴ Since the *logistikon* is ruling, the priority is the wellbeing of the whole soul. Each part of the soul should get its fair due while not compromising the wellbeing of the whole soul. For this very reason, oppression and tyranny are not signs of friendship.

If we understand the erotic forces of society as a reflection of the erotic forces of the psyche, Plato's analysis of the orderly soul is essentially a *theôria* of the constitution of the soul through the transfiguration of *erôs*. Each *polis* represents the configuration of the erotic forces in the soul of its members. Plato is not trying to suppress *erôs*, but to positively affect its dynamics. For this reason, the ordering of the soul is the ordering of man's striving. As political philosopher, Plato is concerned with the dynamics among the different social groups within a community as to determine whether or not it is possible for man to live in order. The exploration of the orderly soul led Plato to consciously theorize (in the ancient Greek sense) for the first time

¹⁶³ Moderation, unlike wisdom and courage, is taken to be a sort of order that spreads throughout the city (431e).

¹⁶⁴ Socrates had already mentioned the fruits of justices, that is, cooperation and friendship (351d).

in history about fundamental problems of order in human existence. The first problem, portrayed in the Phoenician Tale, is that men are both equal and unequal. For Plato, these differences were given in nature (*phusis*), but not so much in the biological sense as in the psychological sense.¹⁶⁵ Plato deals with this issue specifically in Book V when revising the provisions for the good city regarding the education of women. The most obvious biological difference is the female sex bears children while the male sex does not (454d). Yet, these differences, while not irrelevant, do not account for how accomplished a person could be in specific pursuits (454c). Put differently, regardless of sex, phenotype, and physical strength, people might be suited to pursue the same way of life if their souls are naturally arranged for it (454c-d). To this effect, Plato understood that men are equal to the extent that they all share the same elements in their souls (518c). The differences rest in the variants of the dynamic relations among the soul's elements. In other words, the difference among men is a difference in the configuration of their souls. Being all elements of the soul erotic by nature, the configuration is dependent on the erotic strength of each element. Now, if we proceed like Socrates and apply the anthropological principle, the only way that a good *polis* could emerge is if the variants (people) can be harmonized in a correct hierarchical relation. Tragically, there is no guaranty that all the required variants (people), including the miraculous appearance of the philosopher, will appear in a given community.¹⁶⁶ If, by some divine providence it was the case that all variants do appear in a group of men, the philosopher would be limited to what he could do given the concrete historical circumstances. That was the case of Socrates and Plato, who, with all their genius, were unable to reestablish order in Athens.

A second problem identified by Plato was that the foundation and maintenance of a good city was depended on constant philosophizing, an issue that is not properly dealt with until Book VI and that culminates in the foundation of an even better city, the *kallipolis* (527c). If we recall the foundation of the primitive city, Socrates acted as the appointed *oikistês*, as the overseer. The city did not simply emerge “organically,” but it rose under the instructions of Socrates, the philosopher. We have the same situation in the founding of the good city. Socrates was the assigned overseer of the good city because he was the one overseeing the theological revision as well as the education of the guardians. To this extent, the order of the city is external to the city,

¹⁶⁵ Biological differences should be understood broadly, including not only sex, but also size and phenotype.

¹⁶⁶ Plato is quite clear that philosophical existence is a result of divine dispensation, particularly considering the states of affairs in Athens (492e).

for it can only be found in the soul of the philosopher (412a). Thus, Plato depicts the philosopher as the ordering force in the community. But the philosopher, just like the good city, is not born with the order written in his soul. To be sure, the philosopher is born with the right disposition, but the order of his soul is the result of an education that aims at the contemplation of divine things (500b-d). In other words, the order in the soul of the philosopher has its origin outside of it as well. Plato masterfully illustrates the predicament in the Allegory of the Cave.

The Allegory of the Cave is well known. It is a story that illustrates the philosopher's education and his fate in a corrupt society, clearly alluding to the death of Socrates. The allegory starts by describing a group of men living in an underground cave, with an entrance a long way up, which is both open to the light and as wide as the cave itself (514a). These people have been there since childhood, immovable in the same place, with their necks and legs chained, capable to see only in front of them, for their bonds stop them from turning their heads around (514a). Light in the depths of the cave comes from a fire burning far above and behind them (514b). Behind them, also on higher ground, there is a path stretching between them and the fire. Along this path a small wall has been built, similar to the screen that puppeteers use to show their puppets (514b). But the prisoners do not see the puppets directly. They cannot even see themselves. Having been chained with their heads in the opposite direction, unable to turn around, they are only able to see the shadows the fire casts on the wall in front of them (515a). Having grown up in these circumstances, they name the shadows believing that the truth is nothing other than shadows (515b-c).

The description of the setting is short, but rich in symbolism. Once again, just like in the epilogue, Plato depicts human beings as living in darkness. Yet, human beings do not seem to belong to this environment. They are being held by chains to believe that what is real are shadows on the wall. Indeed, the allegory subordinates truth to reality; what is real is true. What we name is what we take to be real. Language neither constructs reality nor constitutes it. To this effect, Plato's thought has no trace of Kant or Hegel in it. Man *can* know what is truly real if he is freed from his bonds. Reality or truth is accessible to man and not limited to the categories of the understanding, for the chains are external forces restraining man from what is truly of his nature. Man has eyes to see the light of truth. However, the bondage illustrates the human condition as almost hopeless. There is no actual explanation of how a prisoner is released. It sort of just happens inexplicably, one would say out of divine providence, in the same manner as the

appearance of a philosopher in a corrupt society (492e). Moreover, once the prisoner is released, he must be *compelled* to stand up, turn his head, walk, and look up toward the light (515c). The prisoner must be compelled because he is not even aware he is a prisoner. The prisoner must be also compelled because the way up is painful, both physically and psychologically. His eyes would hurt upon the contact with the light and he would be thrown back thinking that the shadows are truer than the objects themselves (515d). For this reason, the prisoner must be dragged by force, up the rough, steep path, into the sunlight (515e). The prisoner would need to get adjusted before seeing the things in the world above (516a). At first, he would see shadows most easily, then reflections of things in the water, and then the things themselves (516a). Finally, the prisoner would be able to see the sun itself (516b). Once the prisoner has seen the sun, he would deduce and conclude that “the sun provides the seasons and the years, governs everything in the visible world, and is in some way the cause of all the things that he used to see” (516b-c).

Right after Socrates has explained how the prisoner arrives at vision of the sun, he urges his companions to fit the story together with what had been previously said before regarding the Analogy of the Sun and the Divided Line (517a-b).¹⁶⁷ Let us first explore what was previously said. Socrates had divided reality in two realms, the visual and the noetic (507b). What the sun is to the visual realm, in relation to sight and visible things, the Good is in the noetic realm, in relation to understanding and intelligible things (508b). The eye is the most akin organ to the sun, for it receives its capacity of sight from the sun. What is more, the eye, thanks to its power of sight conferred by the sun, is able to see the sun itself (508a-b). By analogy, the eye of soul (*nous*) is the most akin organ to the Good, for it has the capacity to understand (508d). Now, the Good is neither intellect (*nous*) nor its objects (*nooumena*).¹⁶⁸ The Good is what make things intelligible in the noetic realm (*noetos topos*), that is, it “what gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower” (508d). In addition, the objects of knowledge not only owe their being known to the Good, but their being is also due to it, “although the Good is not being, but superior to it in rank and power” (509b).¹⁶⁹ Lastly, though the vision of the Good (*ê tou agathou idea*) is the cause of knowledge (*epistêmê*) and truth (*alêtheia*), it is also an object of

¹⁶⁷ Here, Plato does use the word *analogos*.

¹⁶⁸ The sun is neither the eye nor the objects the eye can see.

¹⁶⁹ The sun not only provides visibility but also existence, growth, and nurture to the visible things, although it is not itself generation (*genesis*) (509b).

knowledge (508e). Note that what is an object of knowledge is the vision of the Good rather than the Good itself. In other words, what is a noetic object is the *experience* of the *Agathon*.

Now, if we proceed to fit the allegory with the analogy as Socrates requested, we will understand that the leap in being is real in Plato, for “the visible realm should be likened to the prison dwelling, and the light of the fire inside it to the power of the sun” (517b). Since the sun is not itself generation (*genesis*) (509b), the *Agathon* is completely removed from the world of Becoming (518c-d). In other words, it is with Plato that the cosmos stops being enclosed. The introductory setting of the Allegory of the Cave, probably the most important aspect of the allegory, confirms our deductions. As described, the mouth of the cave is both open to the light and as wide as the cave itself (515a). This detail is important because it is often overlooked that the freed prisoner never steps out of the cave. The prisoner is dragged to the sunlight, but not to the outsides of the cave. Why does he not go out completely? It would appear as if the prisoner cannot do it, at least, he cannot do it and remain alive. The prisoner is in love with the things he cannot completely grasp. Plato describes these things as truly real, as unreachable, as unchanging, as things that are not subject to time and space (476e; 478a; 484b; 485a). Consequently, the philosopher seeks the immutable, yet he can never be so. He is a man with a body trapped in time and history.

Although we have already stated that Plato was no modern, this argument requires more clarification because the most compelling argument that could refute our analysis understands that the noetic realm is merely noetic, namely, it is a realm of thought. There is nothing truly transcendental about it; it is just a *quality* of the psyche. Put differently, the study of the forms, including the form of the Good, is a purely theoretical endeavor. It is considered to be an abstract enterprise in the strict sense of the word.¹⁷⁰ According to this view, the Divided Line is meant to illustrate the stages of comprehension until the achievement of real understanding. Truth be told, there is veracity about in this argument, for the upward journey to the vision of the Good is a journey of the soul and as such it requires noetic understating. Yet, Plato does not understand the endeavor to be purely a thought exercise. Hypothesis about things are thoughts that mean to explain the things themselves as in geometry, mathematics, and other related sciences (510d; 511a). Hypotheses mean to explain the order and structure of the cosmos and, for this reason,

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, chapter 10 of Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 242–271.

hypotheses are “stepping stones to take off from, enabling it [reason] to reach the unhypothetical first principle of everything” (511b). Something that is beyond or free from hypothesis has to be something real. To this effect, the first principle, the *Agathon*, is a real “object” beyond the subjectivity of the mind. If the first principle is real and beyond *genesis*, it means that it has to belong to another plane of existence beyond physics (metaphysics). From this also follows that the importance that Plato attributes to the soul has to do with its trans-phenomenal reach, that is, with its kinship with the Good and its capacity of contemplating it (518c). Plato moves beyond thought to the First Principle, to God.

If the purpose of the investigation is to answer Glaucon’s and Adeimantus’ question, then Plato is attempting to provide a *logos*, an intelligible account, about reality that moves “human thought to pass beyond physicalism as, earlier, physicalism had superseded mythical cosmogony.”¹⁷¹ Plato is concerned with people recognizing the divine in the cosmos, that is, the cosmos is not simply matter and flux, but it is orderly and structured due to the Good. Plato did not deny the flux of the universe, but he understood that, in such conception, the world could not have a *logos*, an intelligible account. And, even worse, in such conception, morality is merely a product of conventions, just as Glaucon illustrated in his speech. To this extent, Plato introduces the Allegory of the Cave to make explicit that a full understanding of reality requires a turning around of the soul to the vision of the *Agathon* (518d). The vision of the Good is reached only with difficulty (517b). It is an upward journey from Hades to the gods, until reaching the First Principle (521c). It is this turning around of the soul, the ascent to what is, that Plato took to be true philosophy (521c). Since the turning around of the soul requires the soul to already have the quality to see the Good, just as a man must have eyes to see the sun, the only thing an educator can do is to turn the instrument of vision around from the world of Becoming (*genesis*) to the world of Being (*ousia*) (518b-c). Thus, the philosopher’s education aims at inducing the upward journey of the soul (517b). The virtue created in the soul by the vision of the Good is not the same as the other four virtues previously discussed (518d). This virtue is called *phronêsis* (518e).

Plato is a theist. Yet, Plato is not trying to provide a doctrine about God. This is why Socrates is so hesitant to speak of the Good itself (506c). About the Good itself, nothing can be really said. The Good is beyond the reach of the philosopher and prepositions regarding its

¹⁷¹ Cushman, *Therapeia*, 26.

content are impossible. Probably, one of the fundamental insights of Plato's ethics is that dogmatism is not possible; certitude is impossible.¹⁷² Rather, Plato is concerned with the *experience* of the *Agathon*, the vision that creates the required virtue to rule well. This virtue is characterized by the lack of internal conflicts in the soul and with knowledge of what is actually good (520c-d). *Phronêsis* is written in the soul of the philosopher and the philosopher will write it in the community. And, for this reason, Socrates judges that only until philosophers rule as kings or those who are called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide, cities will have no rest from evils, nor will the human race (473c-d).

As the prisoner in the cave, the philosopher who achieve the contemplation of the Good will be inclined to stay up there forever (517c). Having contemplated the truth, he will wish to live as close as possible to it and will not compromise his striving. Therefore, the philosophers who undergone the journey up to the mouth of the cave must be compelled to return and do what is just, that is, to do what is their function; they must return to rule (519d-520a). The decree only applies to the city that enabled the philosophical education, for the law persuades and compels all members of the *polis* to "share with each other the benefits that each class can confer on the community" (519e). The decree also brings us back to the opening scene of the *Republic*, the going down of Socrates. The philosopher must return in order to bring light to the darkness of the cave, to bring light into existence.

Now, one must be extremely careful not to treat Plato's construction of the soul and society as a doctrine. Plato was quite aware of its limitations.¹⁷³ Yet, given that Greek statesmen drafted constitutions with the sole object of realizing them, we can rightfully wonder if Plato's intentions were the reformation of Athens or the establishment of a new city. Of course, this is a matter of speculation, for we simply have not historical proof that Plato's motives were those. Since the dialogue is being read as Plato's own experience of reality, his intentions must be discovered within the realm of meaning constrained by the dialogues.¹⁷⁴ In the dialogues, particularly in the *Republic*, Plato is in serious competition with the statesmen, for there is

¹⁷² As Socrates points out, "Whether it is true or not, only the god knows" (517b).

¹⁷³ The construction of the soul can be also appreciated in the *Phaedrus* (246a). Yet, in the *Laws*, Plato abandons the construction and replaces it with more flexible symbolism of the puppets and their cords pulling in different directions (644d).

¹⁷⁴ Here, we are following the assumptions of the theoretical approach. See Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:143.

definitely a Solonic component in his personality (599e). Plato is indeed criticizing reforms that took place during the fifth century, which finally led to the Peloponnesian War. However, Plato does not hold the mistakes of Athenian statesmen as the ultimate cause for the collapse of Athens. The dialogue points to the degeneration of the soul, and hence, Plato does not claim his authority as a statesman, but as a spiritual leader. Historically, spiritual guidance, that is guidance in the order of being, was provided by the *nomos* of the *polis*. In times of Plato, there was no separation of church and state and, thus, it is highly unlikely that Plato conceived his spiritual authority as different from the authority of a statesman. Ancient Greeks understood human existence as *political* existence and, to this extent, the restoration of order in the soul implied a political restoration in which the soul could exist as an active citizen. But, as explained by Socrates, it does not matter if this newly reformed city is ever founded in the concrete (592e). Plato was quite aware of the historical circumstances that prevented him from finding a political alliance that would undertake the founding of such a city under his philosophical guidance:

“[T]he members of this small group [lovers of wisdom] have tasted how sweet and blessed a possession philosophy is, and at the same time they have also seen the madness of the majority and realized, in a word, that hardly anyone acts sanely in public affairs and that there is no ally with whom they might go to the aid of justice and survive, that instead they would perish before they could profit either their city or their friends and be useless both to themselves and to others, just like a man who has fallen among wild animals and is neither willing to join them in doing injustice nor sufficiently strong to oppose the general savagery alone. Taking all this into account, they lead a quiet life and do their own work. Thus, like someone who takes refuge under a little wall from a storm of dust or hail driven by the wind, the philosopher, seeing others filled with lawlessness, is satisfied if he can somehow lead his present life free from injustice and impious acts and depart from it with good hope, blameless and content” (494c-e).

The dialogue consistently shows that Plato had no illusions of political success. Most importantly, the above quote shows that the preservation of order in the soul takes predominant importance over participation in the politics of the city. The philosopher owns nothing to the corrupt society. Yet, as the political being that Plato was, the unfortunate circumstances are deeply felt in the dialogue because under a suitable *politeia*, his own growth would have been fuller, and he would have saved the community as well as himself (497a). In this sense, it needs to be stressed the foundation of the city is not meant as political project that aims to bring about an ideal state. Plato is no ideologue. Plato is not concerned with *ideals*, but with the reality of order. As explained above, it is a cognitive inquiry in to the soul which, given Plato’s historical circumstances and who he was as an Athenian, unfolds as the founding of *a* city. This city goes

through four different stages.¹⁷⁵ The first *polis* (369b-372c) is said to be healthy (*hugiês*) and true (*alêthinê*). The second *polis* (372c-376e) is said to be luxurious (*truphôsâ*) and feverish (*phlegmainousa*). The third *polis* (376e-445e) is said to be good (*agathê*) and right (*orthê*). Finally, the fourth *polis* (449a-541-b) is said to be better (*kallion*) than the previous good *polis* and thus it is called the *kallipolis* (527c). To this effect, when we use the word ideal to describe Plato's *kallipolis*, we are providing the connotation of a political ideal that Plato's own vocabulary did not have.¹⁷⁶ The chances of misinterpretation are greater today because the subjectivity the word ideal carries allows philosophical insensitive scholars such as Karl Popper to accuse Plato of being an ideologue. Yet, Plato's terminology – “by nature,” “good,” “best,” “right,” or “better” – is meant to describe the state (*politeia*) of a particular *polis*, and *not* a political project or political ideology.

Finally, if Plato were an ideologue, the *kallipolis*, once established, should not disintegrate. The *kallipolis* is a city in which the Idea of the Good has been embodied; yet the embodiment can be solely temporary as it takes place in the world of Becoming. The fall of the city is inevitable because it is beyond the powers of man to predict and prevent the flux of the cosmos, particularly regarding the variants (people) required to maintain the order. Note that the provisions for the *kallipolis*, the community of women and children, attempt to address exactly that. The provisions are not a eugenic project, but rather their meaning is cosmological, that is, it concerns with the instability of cosmos.¹⁷⁷ Because the *kallipolis* is not exempt from the rhythms of the cosmos, it is foreseeable that the guardians will educate children with the wrong disposition (546c). Once miscalculations have occurred, decay is unavoidable. Consequentially, it must be added that Plato's *kallipolis* is not the form of the good city, but just a good city.¹⁷⁸ Put differently, Plato's analysis of a good city is indeed an analysis of *a* city, and *not* of the form (*eidos*) of the good *polis*. Plato is exploring *a politeia*, but there are as many forms (*eidê*) of *politeia* as there are human characters (544d-e). This must receive some emphasis since the city is one of the many good cities there could be, in the multiplicity of ways that it could be

¹⁷⁵ We can say that the dialogue deals with four different cities as long as we understand that there is continuity. One city is built on top on the other one.

¹⁷⁶ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:136. According to Voegelin, when Plato's good *polis* was first described as an ideal city, the intentions were to praise Plato. Yet, Voegelin argues that this generation had lost some of their philosophical sensitivity since an idealist is a person who is not in touch with reality. An idealist is someone who is not practical, whose valuations are in opposition to reality.

¹⁷⁷ See Voegelin, *Order and History*, 3:172-175.

¹⁷⁸ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:136.

arranged, according to the necessary conditions. Indeed, the fall of the *kallipolis* is narrated as a story that is conditional to particular circumstances that might affect the order of the soul. Thus, the purpose of the third phase of the investigation is to analyze disorders in the soul, namely, injustice (545b).

The Epilogue

The concluding Book of the *Republic* is a masterful work on the Art of Measurement (*metrêtikê technê*), which is the art that permits man to disregard the distortions of judgment that stem from the perspective of time.¹⁷⁹ What is ultimately real is not the ever-changing world of Becoming, but rather the out of time world of Being. Thus, Plato recognizes the vision of the *Agathon* and its embodiment in the soul of the philosopher as the correct measure, measuring life in the prospective of death and eternity. God, and not man, is the measure, as opposed to what the sophist Protagoras held (597c-d).¹⁸⁰ Yet, the attack in the epilogue is not direct to the Sophists, but to the poets and poetry.

To understand the attack, we must place in the context of the “ancient quarrel” between philosophy and poetry, a placement done by Plato himself (607b). Traditional poetry aimed at educating people by capturing experiences and lessons of the past. Philosophy, as understood by Plato, is also concerned with education. However, philosophy is not the capturing of experiences and lessons, at least not in words. *Philosophia* cannot be written down. *Philosophia* is a way of being in the world, an activity of living people in pursuit of the Good (521c). *Philosophia* is only written in the soul of the person who is consciously in pursuit of truth with all his being. To this effect, the *Republic* is not philosophy. The *Republic* is philosophical discourse, an expression of the philosophical experience, but not philosophy *per se*. Philosophical discourse is a particular form of poetry that aims at elucidating the philosophical life and the role of philosophy in human existence. However, anything that is important in life is ultimately alive and experiential, and hence, it is impossible to write down for the appreciation and learning of all. Plato might have written his dialogues with the purpose of inducing the philosopher’s education, but he was

¹⁷⁹ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 2:365.

¹⁸⁰ Protagoras, Diels-Kranz B1.

powerless regarding its effects. Education is a personal struggle because knowledge is embodied and hence, it must be personally achieved.

Thus, the difference between poetry and philosophy cannot be reduced to style or content in spoken or written works, since written works such as the *Republic* are not philosophy. Yet, Plato does deem the dramatic dialogue form to be superior to any other form of writing, including comedy and tragedy, because it is the only type of inquiry that systematically attempts to acquire knowledge about things, without leaving hypotheses untouched until arriving to the unhypothetical First Principle, the Good (533b-c). While the understanding of soul had greatly advanced since Homer through the mystic-philosophers and tragedians, poetry in the traditional education had become obsolete and no longer useful as an instrument of expression for the experience of the philosophical soul. To illustrate, Voegelin compares the four stages of the *polis* to Hesiod's ages of the gods.¹⁸¹ The gods represent different forces of the soul, which Hesiod attempted to make intelligible in his *Theogony*. The forces of the soul are experienced as conflicting and, hence, the story is narrated as a series of battles and victories, until the highest ordering of the soul arises triumphantly. In the *Republic*, Plato uses the form by also arranging the cities, which represent the forces experienced by the soul that Plato seeks to elucidate, as a series of struggles until the *kallipolis* emerges victoriously having the best element of the soul as its ruler (520c-d). But, unlike the *Theogony*, the *Republic* is not an epic. It is rather a drama in which the characters periodically and dramatically imprint the essence of their characters into the *polis*. While epic depicts man as a plaything of the gods, drama depicts man as an agent. In a drama, man may or may not be empowered by the circumstances, but he has choices to make. Man is not completely at a loss. There is within his soul an instrument that, if properly turned, shows man his kinship with the Divine. Likewise, if the society is fortunate enough, there is also the philosopher who can guide both the individual and the community. Thus, the difference in style is not an accident, for it masterfully conveys the ascent of the soul to new existential meaning. It best portrays the drama of human existence, which, as an exploration of the *psuchê*, is the struggle of man rising into an understanding of himself. To this effect, it depicts man in its highest consciousness, for it illustrates man rising in his understanding concerning his kinship with the Divine and the misfortunes of not arranging his life according to its exigencies.

¹⁸¹ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:151.

Again, it must be stated that Plato is not at war with poetry as an art. Plato antagonizes the poets and poetry, specifically traditional poetry, because it could deter man from the Good. The quarrel is for the soul of man. Having distinguished the separate parts of the soul (595a), poets like Homer become a problem because their poems lack wisdom concerning the subjects of their poetry (602a). Homer and the tragedians know little about the *psuchê* and its kinship with the Good, since they do not realize that their poems mostly nourish the inferior parts of the soul by influences that play on its passions, ultimately destroying the strength of the *logistikôn* (605a-b) and with it its ability of measuring correctly (603a). For this reason, if such poetry were to be allowed, it is “likely to distort the thought of anyone who hears it, unless he has the knowledge of what it is really like, as a drug to counteract it” (595b). The counteract drug is the right education that seeks to establish and preserve the right *politeia* within the soul (608a-b). When the soul is not beset by many evils, when we look at its pure form, without its association with the body, we realize that what it grasps and what it longs for is what always is, for soul is akin and immortal as the Divine (611b-e). To this extent, justice is the true *aretê* of the soul and the best thing for the soul itself, and for this very reason, a person ought to do what is just, with or without the ring of Gyges (612b).

There is certainly a troubling but valid argument presented by the poets that is worth addressing. Poets might ask whether or not we also need a drug to counteract the effects of philosophy. If philosophy is a drug, is not there also a danger of overdose? Truth be told, if we follow the analogy, there is always a danger. Probably the most worrisome is the loyalty of the philosopher to the Good instead of the community. The philosopher is a radical, for he is unable to compromise his striving. For the philosopher, there is no politics that are worth engaging with unless they direct the community towards the exigencies of the Good.¹⁸² Yet, politics are concerned, first of all, with the preservation of the community, which might entail compromises that the philosopher cannot make. After all, the community is an *aggregate* of many members with many different drives. Why would the community make a place for the philosopher if his loyalty is with Good and not with them? To this we must say that Plato makes clear that love for the Good comes before love of country, since each of us must neglect all other endeavors (including politics) and be most concerned to seek out and learn from the one who can distinguish the good life from the bad life (628b-c). Given the historical context, in which

¹⁸² Note that this is the only reason why the philosopher kings return to rule.

Athenians understood their *aretê* as political beings, we cannot help but recognize that Plato understands human beings beyond the community, beyond politics, that is, it is possible for man to achieve *aretê* beyond the community. This is not to be confused with liberal individualism, for Plato is not saying that man is not a political animal. Plato is discovering that man is more than a political animal; man has kinship with the Divine. Man is in-between the temporal world of politics and the everlasting world of eternity. But this only makes sense if we understand Plato as a theist, for he was trying to provide man with its rightful place in the order of the cosmos. Only philosophy can show the way up to the Good, within or outside the community.

Plato culminates that dialogue with the Myth of Er, a man of all tribes, emphasizing once again brotherhood of men as well as the theological revision. The gods are not responsible for the fate of man (617e). The responsibility lies with the one who makes the choices, and thereby, each of us must neglect all other activities and be most preoccupied with seeking out and learning from the philosopher who can distinguish the good life from the bad life (618b-c). “This is the way that a human being becomes happiest” (619a).

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to show that the *Republic* is also a dialogue about *erôs*, such as the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, for it also aims at providing a direction to man's striving. The *Republic* deals specifically with the morphology of the *psuchê* and its erotic nature. The soul is depicted by Plato as a manifold of erotic forces that, if properly ordered, show man its kinship with the Divine. To this effect, the psychological picture provided in the *Republic* is one of the first theorizations of the *psuchê* and its transcendental constitution.

To arrive at these conclusions, one must be alert to Kantian interpretations and seriously ponder on the implications of what this means, even if it challenges what we believe to be true today. First of all, Plato was no Kantian. Unlike modern thinkers, Plato did not limit the capacity of reason to the categories of the understanding. Second, Plato was not an idealist (in the Kantian sense), for he was not concerned with ideas and concepts *per se*. To this extent, we must remain cautious to interpretations of Plato as a modern atheist who is concerned with a place in the history of ideas. Thus, we must ask ourselves, what motivated Plato to write a work of such a considerable length? The first part of the thesis' analysis attempted to do just that by placing the dialogue in its historical context. For example, we considered the fact the Plato's writings undermine political participation in a time when virtue was measured precisely in terms of political achievements.

Plato's *Republic* gains its specific meaning in the historical situation of Athens as well as in the intellectual discourse of philosophers that preceded Plato such as Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides. The historical context was certainly intricate. They were critical times both physically, for Athens had lost the Peloponnesian Wars, and spiritually, since Greek mythology had been superseded by physicalism with the assistance of the Sophists.¹⁸³ In the *Republic*, Plato provides both an assessment of the historical circumstances and a solution. The assessment is that

¹⁸³ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2000, 3:117.

mythical cosmogony had become harmful, since it enabled the dispersion of physicalism, which resulted in cynicism about the gods and depreciation of moral values. Plato realized that in a world explained only through material causality, morality could be nothing more than a convention.

Plato's provision starts with an examination of the *psuchê*, following the patterns of philosophers that preceded him such as Heraclitus. The stages of the *polis* are made intelligible as an exploration of the soul by accepting Socrates' assumption, that the city is the soul written large, as anthropological principle (as an insight into reality) rather than as a metaphor or an analogy. The assumption entails that the different elements that compose a society are essentially a multiplicity of erotic psychological forces. Likewise, the soul is a manifold of social forces, one of them being an ordering force, the *logistikon*, due to its capacity to distinguish the right purpose for the other psychic forces. When the soul is properly ordered by the *logistikon*, it enables its ascent towards the idea of the Good, the First Principle giving order and structure to existence. The vision of the *Agathon* is first and foremost an experience. Yet, the Good is described by Plato as an "object" of knowledge outside time and space. For this reason, nothing much can be said about it, since immanent propositions cannot really capture its form. What is important, however, is the virtue embodied upon its contemplation, for it establishes the right order of the soul in the philosopher, who would then be able to measure through his soul the right order for society. To this extent, the distortions of time shall be overcome through the *love* of the measure that is out of time. Necessarily, if the order is no longer "cosmic," Plato is portraying the advent of a new existential order that cannot be properly expressed through mythical cosmogony. Thus, Plato's attack on the poets is not an attack on poetry and myth *per se*, but an attack on misinterpretations of reality. We are then essentially concerned with Plato's *logos* of the world.

Erôs for the Good is the alternative *logos*. This is why we sustain that Plato was no atheist. The dialogue suggests a conscious search for a standard in reality for the proper metamorphosis of *erôs*. Now, we must understand that Plato is not providing us with a doctrine or system to make the world intelligible, for a full account is limited to the gods alone. Plato only seeks to provide, by means of reason, a way out of the darkness of Thrasymachus' world. His investigation is then concerned with whether or not man can live orderly. And, most importantly, whether or not this order can be found in reality. Plato believed that man could uncover the order

of reality in the ordered soul, for it shows man its kinship with transcendental reality. To this effect, Plato recovered the mystery of existence.

Having understood the circumstances that motivated Plato to write the *Republic*, it is not surprising that modern scholarship has paid so much attention to it. With the death of God, the Western world is now confronting with a similar predicament. Our historical reality is different, probably even more intricate, given technological emancipation and widespread secularization. Our Thrasymachus has become far more sophisticated, for nowadays, physicalism does not simply deny transcendental reality, but attributes it to the structure of the human mind, resulting in desensitization to our experiences and longings. Our yearning is now experienced with anxiety and dread, for man does not feel at home in the world and, in the modern age, all other doors are shut. We are now a society that submerges itself in science fiction, hiding from the painful “reality” while longing for the mystery we once experienced with joy. Consequentially, modern man has no choice than to behold immanent goals, resulting in the pervasion of reason into systematic and ideological thinking such as Communism, Fascism and Liberalism. The dangers of the dedeivinized world are well known; modern man is faced with the abyss of immanent meanings of the world and eventually to the anarchy and horror of nothingness. Our times are indeed frightening times. We have not overcome the disease that led us to the bloodiest wars in the history of humanity. And it is impossible to think about any other solution than the one proposed by Plato over two thousand years ago. Since man cannot will himself into not being a man, man must reconcile with his experiential life. Only God knows how the drama of the modern man will unfold.

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