



**OXFORD JOURNALS**  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Source: *Mind*, Jan., 1902, New Series, Vol. 11, No. 41 (Jan., 1902), pp. 31-53

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of the Mind Association

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2248056>

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## II.—THE LATER ONTOLOGY OF PLATO.

BY A. W. BENN.

It is only within recent years that a complete and satisfactory view of Plato's philosophy has been made possible. Such a view may not yet exist; but at any rate we have what our predecessors had not, something like adequate materials for its construction. By a rare good fortune, indeed, the world has always possessed all that Plato ever wrote about philosophy; but his writings have come down to us without any authoritative interpretation, with imperfect external evidence of their authenticity, and with no external evidence whatever, beyond the fact that the *Laws* was the last published, of the order in which they were composed. There are thinkers like Plato's own disciple, Aristotle, who can be thoroughly understood in the complete absence of such chronological information, for their systems are perfected before they begin to teach, and each successive treatise does but add fresh illustrations of the same unalterable principles. That formal systematisation was ever present as an ideal to Plato, but was never actually realised. His artistic instincts were always leading him away from the rigid symmetry which as a dialectician he professed to admire; as an Athenian noble he despised those habits of plodding industry without which strict self-consistency cannot be achieved; and above all he had a mind that was always growing, that readily responded to altered circumstances, and that was constantly assimilating new material. The older interpreters could not see this, they mistook him for a pedant like themselves; and there are some who cannot see it now. Hence one attempt after another has been made to get rid of the contradictions that abound in his writings by a perverted exegesis, or by a wholesale rejection as spurious of some of the most important Platonic documents; or, if of a more genial turn, they contended that this great inaugurator of reasoned truth threw out with supreme irony a handful of irreconcilable theses to be fought over by his credulous disciples. It has been reserved for our own

time to introduce into this study also the fertile method of evolution already applied with such success to the Pentateuch and to Homer; and, what was indispensable to a right understanding of Plato, it has given us, to begin with, an account of the order in which his *Dialogues* were composed, based not on any doubtful *a priori* theory of their logical development, but on unimpeachably disinterested philological evidence.<sup>1</sup>

For this important achievement, the indispensable condition of all further progress, we are chiefly indebted to English scholarship; and that such should be the case seems a fitting reward for the devotion to Platonic studies which has honourably distinguished our country ever since the Tudor period, a devotion common to our thinkers and our poets, to the children of the Renaissance and the children of Puritanism, to the pupils of James Mill, and the pupils of Jowett. There is, indeed, as Wordsworth observed, a large infusion of Platonism in the English genius; and the claim will only be rejected by those who have failed to discern how much of practicality there is in the one and how much of idealism in the other. But the kinship of the English mind to the mind of Plato, if such there be, is a privilege that has its dangers. Our interpreters are apt to put more into him than he contains, to read him in the light of their own favourite speculations, to credit him with a maturity, or at least a modernity of which, with all his anticipatory reach, the Athenian prophet was quite incapable. Charles Kingsley tells us of a Cambridge tutor who put a too inquisitive undergraduate in his right place by observing that their business was to translate Plato, not to understand his philosophy. If that stern teacher still lives he might profitably warn a later generation that their present business is to understand Plato's philosophy, not to translate it into terms of modern thought. The author of the *Parmenides* and the *Timæus* was neither a Hegelian nor a Kantian, neither a Leibnizian nor a Berkeleyan; he was not even a Platonist, except in so far as Platonism means a life-long passion for truth, an unweariable capacity for rising to new points of view. But we must learn to admit that among those points of view the subjectivity of modern philosophy had no place. The notion of matter as a mental function, still more the ideality of space and time—first glimpsed by Spinoza—never dawned on his horizon.

<sup>1</sup> For a full, clear and interesting account of the methods and results of this investigation, see Lutoslawski's *Origin and Growth of Plato's Logic*, London, 1897.

In this respect the Germans, with their wider and more careful reading, have a great advantage over us. A critic like Zeller acquires from his familiarity with the whole range of ancient and modern speculation a certain tact that makes such misconceptions impossible to him; and when they are seriously put forward by others his familiarity with the Platonic texts brings to his memory the decisive passages by which they are dispelled. That Zeller should refuse to admit what is good and sound in English criticism when he finds it associated with the chimerical interpretations alluded to is natural, though regrettable. But there is reason to hope that younger German scholars will keep a more open mind on the subject.

So far it may be claimed that one important result of the new Platonic criticism has been placed beyond all reasonable doubt, and that another result, although far from certain, has been made at least extremely probable. Of these the first relates to the order of the *Dialogues*, and the second to the Theory of Ideas. It is now generally admitted that the so-called dialectic dialogues were written after the *Republic*, and represent a more advanced stage of reflexion; while among the dialectic dialogues themselves the *Parmenides* precedes the *Sophist*. The *Timæus* keeps its old place as a late composition coming not long before the *Laws*; and a strong case has been made out for assigning the *Phædrus*, once considered a very early work, to a date falling shortly after the completion of the *Republic*.

With regard to the true meaning of the ideal theory there is less unanimity, and it is a question on which opinions will perhaps always differ. Until a comparatively recent period the accepted interpretation was that Plato credited the Ideas with an independent and separate existence apart from the sensible appearances in which they are manifested to us. Many passages in his own writings, backed as they are by the clear and emphatic testimony of Aristotle, might be quoted in support of such a view. But an increasing number of scholars seem to agree in thinking that it is irreconcilable at least with the positions maintained in what are now ascertained to be the later dialogues. This at any rate is my own view, and the present article is offered as a contribution to its support.

It is admitted that Plato, under the name of Parmenides, has anticipated all the objections subsequently urged against the transcendence of the Ideas, and that he has stated them with a vigour that leaves little or nothing to be desired.

Whether he is attacking his own former theory, or the theory of his disciples, or the theory of the Megarians—a school which by the way seems to owe its existence largely to the historians of philosophy—is a question of little importance in this connexion. The difficulty is that he seems to give away his own criticism by concluding with the declaration that to disallow the existence of eternal and immutable Ideas is to destroy the possibility of dialectics (*Parmenides*, 135 B-C). But such an assertion makes at most for an attitude of provisional scepticism, and leaves the objections to the transcendental theory unimpaired. Perhaps we shall find in the sequel that Plato afterwards hit on a method, more or less satisfactory, for making his way out of the dilemma.

The second part of the *Parmenides* professes to furnish a new mode of testing hypotheses by alternately assuming their truth and falsity, deducing the consequences that result from each position, and comparing them with one another. The cases chosen are the existence and the non-existence of the One. We are invited, that is, to consider what follows from either alternative, first with reference to the One itself, and then with reference to all other things; the reason given for limiting the discussion to these particular theses being that the counter thesis, 'If the Many are,' had already been discussed by Zeno, the disciple of Parmenides, with a view to defending his master's philosophy against superficial objectors. For Parmenides, according to Plato, asserted that the One alone truly is; and when people made merry over the absurdities that follow from such a doctrine Zeno retaliated by exposing the still greater absurdities that would follow from the reality of the Many.

It is important to note that the terms One and Many, as used by Plato, have by no means the same force as the same terms as used by the Eleatics. What with them had been a purely geometrical distinction has become with him a metaphysical distinction. The All, said Parmenides, is one continuum without separation or distinction of parts. For, added Zeno, if space were conceived as divided into parts sundry impossibilities would follow. Plato, on the other hand, means by the One the idea of unity conceived in its very highest degree of generality, and by the Many he means everything besides, everything that is not unity. It is therefore clear that in developing the logical consequences of assuming the existence or non-existence of the One he is not speaking about the universe as a concrete whole; nor do his difficulties find their solution in that view which looks on the Absolute as the reconciling synthesis of contradictory

attributes. Indeed he has been at some pains to exclude such an interpretation. In the *Parmenides* itself he warns us that the discussion is not concerned with visible objects, which are just what the historical Zeno was concerned with (129 *sqq.*); the warning is repeated in the *Philebus*, where, in evident reference to the present argument, the common and obvious paradoxes about the One and Many are only mentioned to be dismissed as childish in comparison with the puzzles arising from the consideration of purely ideal unities (14 D); and once more in the *Sophist* Plato shows himself perfectly aware that the Absolute of *Parmenides* was not an abstract unity, but an individual extended whole (244 E). It is then merely by a dramatic equivocation that the Eleatic couple are introduced as talking about the One and the Many in the *Parmenides*; and we have to ask ourselves why Plato should single out that particular pair of terms for the application of the dialectic method by which the validity of the ideal theory is to be finally tested.

The answer is, in my opinion, that Plato has chosen this particular pair to operate on because the opposition of the One to the Many is the most general expression for the ideal theory itself. He has told us repeatedly in the *Republic* (476 A, 507 B), in the *Phædrus* (265 D), and now once more in the *Parmenides* itself (128 E *sqq.*) that every Idea is the reduction to unity of what our senses showed us as scattered among a multiplicity of phenomena; while in the *Republic* he had pointed to an ultimate Idea, the Good, to which the particular Ideas are in turn related as many to one (509 A, 511 B).<sup>1</sup> If then the assumption of this highest abstraction leads to a series of inextricable contradictions the very acropolis has been betrayed, the old theory must be abandoned as hopeless, and a new interpretation of nature substituted for it. The logical value of the reasonings that fill the latter part of the *Parmenides* is not now in question. They may form a chain of rigorous demonstration, or they may be a tissue of sophistry. In either case the net result is the same. The theory of separate Ideas when reduced to its simplest expression lands us in a quagmire of hopeless contradictions.

A word has been said about the fallacy of interpreting Plato by identifying his doctrines with the results of modern thought. Nevertheless where there is no danger of such confusion, examples drawn from modern philosophy may advantageously be used in illustration or development of his

<sup>1</sup> I think this may fairly be taken as Plato's meaning, although he does not state it in so many words.

principles and methods. In the present instance Locke's criticism of the theory of innate ideas, furnishes, I think, an appropriate parallel. It will be remembered that the great English thinker in contravening the doctrine that there are certain primary notions not acquired by experience which the mind brings with it into the world and possesses in perfection from the first moment of its existence, opens his attack by disputing the *a priori* origin of the two axioms, 'What is, is,' and, 'It is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be'; 'for these,' he thinks, 'have of all others the most allowed title to innate'. But I do not understand Locke to assert that any one had ever in so many words declared these two propositions to be innate; nor am I aware that they were classed as such either by the Stoics or by Lord Herbert of Cherbury, or by Descartes, the opponents whom throughout he has in view. Any how he argues that if principles so general and so certain are not innate, no others are; and although he discusses on their own merits some alleged cases of innateness, the question has, in his opinion, been virtually decided by showing that the supreme laws of logic are not present to every human mind from the moment of birth.

Now what I would suggest is that Plato uses the One and the Many as Locke uses the laws of Identity and Contradiction, namely, in order to cut out the transcendental theory by the roots. For the result of his inquiry is to demonstrate, at least to his own satisfaction, that whether we assume the ideal One to be or not to be, it will both be and not be, and will involve everything else in the same disagreeable predicament. In other words it is a thoroughly nonsensical conception. And we are left to infer that what is true of the supreme Idea must be true of all particular Ideas; they cannot without contradiction be isolated from the multitudinous phenomena which they unite.

But the interest of the *Parmenides* is not exhausted by this result, revolutionary as it seems. It not only gives evidence of Plato's dissatisfaction with the transcendent realism of his middle life, but it also throws a light forward on the inquiry that was next to occupy his thoughts. This is a point on which his silence becomes more significant than his speech. The dialogue is left unfinished,<sup>1</sup> at least to the extent of having no formal conclusion. The interlocutors do not take leave of one another, nor do they agree to meet for a further

<sup>1</sup> I say this deliberately, after reading Maguire's argument to the contrary.

discussion of their difficulties. May we not suspect that Plato was surprised in the middle of his search by an unexpected discovery which so to speak cut across his path at a right angle and set him on a new line of reflexion? To hazard a guess, the discovery was that in losing his first principle of existence he had lost, what to him was no less valuable, his first principle of classification as well.

For knowledge as well as for being the first principle took the form of a contrasted couple. Without such an antithetical arrangement indeed Greek thought could no more live and move than one of the higher animals could live and move without bilateral symmetry of structure. Even when the opposing terms were identified, as by Heracleitus, or one side suppressed, as by Parmenides, it was only their simultaneous presence to the thinker's mind that made thought possible. Now Plato, as we have seen, had chosen the antithesis of the One and the Many as the most general expression of his ideal theory. But on profounder reflexion it had melted away under his touch. Each of the Many reproduced the One: the One resolved itself into an infinite multitude of parts. Fatal to his own system, he seems to have believed that the result was fatal also to the Monism of the Eleatics. Nevertheless it was apparently to Parmenides that he turned in search of a new expression for the ultimate antithesis. At any rate in his next important dialogue, the *Sophist*, three such fundamental distinctions are enumerated, and all three may be traced to the great poem of the Italiote sage; these are, Being and not-Being, Rest and Motion, the Same and the Other (Identity and Difference). Parmenides had declared Being to be eternally unmoved and absolutely homogeneous with itself. According to him Motion and Variety have no positive meaning; they are mere negations, forms of not-Being, and therefore not only non-existent, but even inconceivable, for what is not has most emphatically no being even for thought, since to be thought of and to be are the same. But Plato demurs to the summary logic of his revered master, and at once puts his finger on a fatal flaw in the chain of reasoning. Being and not-Being, he observes, so far from excluding one another in the rigid manner assumed, are found exerywhere co-existing. To say that a thing is itself is to say that it is not anything else. To remain within the limits of the categories above enumerated, Rest is not Motion, and the Same is not the Other. Moreover since both Rest and Sameness *are* they coincide to a certain extent with Being, but do not exhaust it. Thus in reference to pure Being they both are and are not; while



again Being as such is neither Rest nor Sameness, although it rests and is the same with itself. In short not-Being turns out to be just Otherness, and as an independent category must be altogether struck out of our list, which is thus reduced from six to five members, Being, Sameness and Otherness, Rest and Motion, each participating in the nature of the remainder, with the possible exception of Rest and Motion, the relation between which is left unsettled (250 A-259 B).

These somewhat scholastic refinements—which, however, are filled with interest and vitality in the original exposition—must be carefully borne in mind if we would understand the further development of Plato's ontology in the *Timæus*. It will be noticed that our old friends the One and the Many are not included in the list of ultimate Forms. There is an occasional reference to them in the *Sophist*; but on the whole Plato seems to have convinced himself that they were un-serviceable as points of reference in the reorganisation of thought. Or it may be permitted to conjecture that he had now come to identify the Many, like not-Being, with Otherness. In the latter part of the *Parmenides* he had substituted a different expression *τᾶλλα* (the others) for *τὰ πολλά* (the many); this would easily pass into *θᾶτερα*, and then into *θᾶτερον*—the Otherness of the *Sophist*, and this would at once evoke its opposite *ταὐτόν* the Same as a substitute for the One.

As another important result—important, that is, from the Greek point of view—we note that Being has been left without an antithesis, not-Being having been identified with Difference. Now according to a fundamental law of Greek thought that which has no opposite must mediate between opposites. Plato's last analysis then has for its logical consequence the necessity of finding a pair of terms between which Being can be placed; and his table of Forms furnishes two such couples to choose between. It will be remembered that these are Same and Other (or in our language Identity and Difference) on the one hand and Rest and Motion on the other. When he wrote the *Timæus* his choice was made.

Stated generally the object of the *Timæus* seems to be to show how the universe is constructed, how a knowledge of its structure has been made possible for man, and how that knowledge becomes available for the reorganisation of human life. More particularly it is an attempt to provide a satisfactory substitute for that ideal theory which the *Parmenides* had shown by two distinct methods to be untenable, and to effect this by concluding the process of simplification first begun and partly carried out in the *Sophist*.

Plato entered on his literary and philosophic career as a religious agnostic of the Socratic school. Believing like his great master that the gods had reserved the secrets of the external world for their own exclusive cognizance, he devoted himself during the greater part of his efficient life to the study of ethical and logical problems, without any absolute confidence in the power of the human mind to solve even these. But increasing familiarity with the work actually done by contemporary science, especially perhaps in Western Hellas, convinced him that the 'meteorologists,' at whom he had been taught to sneer in his youth, had reached results both in mathematics and astronomy of undeniable certainty, of great immediate utility, and of still greater promise for the future. Personally his opinion of their abilities might not be much altered: he 'had never met a mathematician who could reason'; but he saw that their demonstrations offered a model to which the true reasoner was bound to conform. Again his ethics led him to infer that so mean a passion as envy could have no place in the divine counsels; while his devotional feelings culminated in the identification of the human with the divine spirit. Finally his political studies taught him that the problem of social reorganisation could not be isolated from the problem of cosmology as a whole.

The study of cosmology threw Plato back on the systems of early Greek philosophy. All of these are more or less represented in the *Timæus*, and much of its obscurity is due to his not always very successful attempts at a reconciliation between their opposing or intersecting methods. Our business is only with those parts which seem peculiar to himself and which enter into the general plan of his philosophy conceived as a self-developing logic.

Taking up the thread of that development where it was dropped, we recall the significant circumstance that the form or category of Being was left without its original antithesis not-Being, and that accordingly by the laws of Greek thought it had to be placed as a middle term between two extremes. Well, the principal speaker in the *Timæus* tells us in the mythical phraseology employed throughout that dialogue that the supreme God-mingled together the Same and the Other and produced from them the form of Being, situated between the two (35 A). It must indeed be admitted that the word which I have translated 'Being' is not identical with the word habitually used in the *Sophist* to express that category. In the earlier dialogue Plato says τὸ ὄν, in the present instance he says ἡ οὐσία. But in the *Sophist* also

ἡ οὐσία is used at least once as absolutely synonymous with τὸ ὄν (250 B); and the latter term has probably been avoided in the passage where the composition of Being is described simply because Plato has incidentally to speak of all three categories, the Same, the Other and their joint product as τρία ὄντα, 'being three things,' and there would have been a certain absurdity in implying that two out of the three were in being before Being itself had begun. If, however, it seems desirable to use the word Being only where the original has τὸ ὄν there can be no objection to translating ἡ οὐσία by Existence.<sup>1</sup>

To place Existence between Identity and Difference and to represent it as resulting from their union is more than an advance in logic, it is an advance in metaphysics. For what Plato really means is that the supreme Ideas are not hypothesised essences, but simple abstractions derived from the analysis of concrete existence and having no actuality apart from it. Even in the *Republic* he had already hinted at such a conclusion by declaring that the highest of all Ideas, the Idea of the Good, far exceeded existence in dignity and power (509 B). We may suppose that this superiority consists in the fact that the Good, or as we should say the Ideal, is perpetually moulding reality into conformity with itself.<sup>2</sup>

But this refusal to acknowledge an independent and isolated existence of the Ideas is not to be confounded with a mere reversion to the common-sense or Cynical point of view. It is the natural outcome of Plato's practical genius, the metaphysical expression of his reforming enthusiasm. What he calls the Same is in truth the assimilative principle, the tendency towards order, harmony, and reconciliation. He has already told us in the *Sophist* that being means nothing but power, the capacity for acting or for being acted on (247 D-E). Therefore that the Same may *be* it must assimilate

<sup>1</sup>This is also the word used by Dr. Jackson in his summary of the *Timæus* (*Journal of Philology*, vol. xiii., p. 6). Mr. Archer-Hind renders ἡ οὐσία by 'essence' in his translation of the *Timæus*. I had already proposed 'Existence' in my *Greek Philosophers* (vol. i., p. 266); but I cannot tell whether or not the interpretation was original.

<sup>2</sup>Plato would evidently not have agreed with Descartes in holding that the idea of perfection involves that of existence. A remarkable parallel to his position may be found in that last dying speech and confession of French Eclecticism, Vacherot's *La Métaphysique et la Science* (Paris, 1858), where it is argued in direct opposition to the school to which the author originally belonged that all reality is necessarily imperfect (vol. ii., p. 68); and the parallelism is the more significant as Vacherot himself was not aware of it, being imbued with the old belief that Plato realised his Ideas.

the Different to itself, must carry law and order into what else were chaotic. And that the Different also may *be* it must undergo this action, must submit to this assimilation. Nor is their union a type of practical endeavour alone; it is also the mainspring of scientific classification, which for Plato meant science itself, that which makes possible the dialectical ascent and descent through successive groups of things, with a preponderance of identity at the upper end, of difference at the lower end of the scale.

It is perhaps for this reason, with a view to the exigencies of classification, that the Same and the Other, although without reality apart from their union, are represented as not merged in it, but as continuing to preserve a certain separateness as objects of thought. Such at least seems to be the meaning of a rather mysterious passage in which the Platonic Timæus tells us that God mixed together the Same, the Other and Existence to form the soul. It implies that there are various types of existence distinguished by the relative homogeneity or heterogeneity of their contents, and realised in the first instance as more or less uniform or irregular modes of motion.

Here we enter on the most critical part of the whole discussion, and I must ask the reader to give his best attention to what follows. It relates to the vexed question of what Plato understood by soul (*ψύχη*).

The introduction of a creative God in the *Timæus* is, of course, purely allegorical. Nothing existed before Existence itself; and no external power was needed to combine the abstract elements into which it is decomposed by thought, as in reality they had never been separated. So much is now generally admitted. But the notion of a cosmic soul seems to be more seriously intended; and it is just what has given rise to the theories alluded to at the beginning of this paper as involving, in my opinion, a complete misinterpretation of Plato and a gross anachronism in the history of philosophy. It has not been sufficiently considered that by soul the Greek thinker means an invisible and intangible, but not—what is for us the decisive note of spiritualism—an inextended substance. In the present instance the soul described is, as may easily be gathered from the detailed account of its structure, a limited area of space divided into several concentric zones and engaged in perpetual movement. That space or any part of it should move is for us an inconceivable supposition; but Plato seems to find no difficulty about it. The difficulty for him would rather have been to conceive space as *not* moving. And these rotatory figures

into which the soul-substance is divided are no allegory; they are the orbits of the heavenly bodies, the sphere of the fixed stars with the enclosed spheres (or wheels) in which the sun and planets are carried round the centre of the universe, *i.e.*, the centre of the earth; <sup>1</sup> and in speaking about them as divisions of one great soul he means to emphasise their pure and incorruptible nature, the unchanging constancy of their movements, the mathematical harmony of the intervals by which they are separated, and the spontaneous energy with which their revolutions are performed. Whether seriously or not, these revolutions are represented as being indispensable to the free play of the cosmic intelligence, which through them is kept in touch with every part of the universe and made aware of what goes on through its whole extent. As Grote puts it in his business-like style, 'information is thus circulated about the existing relations between all the separate parts and specialties'. <sup>2</sup>

The conception of soul as inseparable from extension was inherited by Plato from Parmenides, with whom it was a survival of the primitive animism common to all mankind. After refining down corporeal existence to pure space the Eleatic master proceeded naively to identify this attenuated residuum with pure reason, a confusion in which he was followed by Anaxagoras, and which Aristotle was the first to overcome. No thinker indeed has ever made more of the distinction between soul and body than Plato; yet the distinction as we find it in him is always somewhat wavering and relative. From the ideal scheme of the *Timæus* we may perhaps gather that by soul is to be understood that form of existence in which the element of Identity prevails, by body that in which Difference prevails. According to this view, pure space stands for the utmost conceivable amount of Difference, a dim something just at or a little beyond the bounds of legitimate thought. For to Plato as to Kant to think was to condition; only what to the modern is a merely subjective process was to the Greek an objective process also, the process which alone makes existence possible, the process of limitation.

In a somewhat earlier dialogue, the *Philebus*, which like the *Sophist* supplies a connecting link between the *Parmenides* and the *Timæus*, Plato had described this process as a

<sup>1</sup> I am inclined to think that Plato thought of the sun and planets as being carried round the centre of the universe by flat bands or hoops according to the theory of early Greek astronomy, not by spheres as in Aristotle's cosmology.

<sup>2</sup> *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, vol. iv., p. 227 (ed. of 1865).

mingling of the Limit (τὸ πέρασ) with the Unlimited or Infinite (τὸ ἀπειρον, 23 C, 26 D). With a reminiscence of his first antithetical construction he there speaks of the Limit as one and of the Unlimited as many, though without identifying them directly with the One and the Many as such; while again their synthesis, the Limited, is not treated as coextensive with existence, although a phrase occurs about generation into existence, pointing significantly in that direction (26 D).<sup>1</sup> But as the primary object of the *Philebus* is ethical rather than metaphysical—being in fact to show that pleasure only becomes a good through limitation—the ontological problem remains outstanding and first receives its solution in the *Timæus*, where the Limit and the Unlimited reappear as the Same and the Other, and this Other takes the shape—if shape it can be called that shape has none—of infinite space, an abstract of the content enclosed by all quantitative and qualitative limitations, and ever striving to break loose from all.

Space as defined and limited by the courses of the stars and planets presented no difficulties to Plato, for there form and content were inseparably united, and constituted the very type of eternal reality. But on descending to the lower region between sky and earth he found it filled with bodies that come into being and pass out of it again, resolving themselves into the form and matter by whose union they had been temporarily constituted. The forms, whether numbers or geometrical figures, or qualities, or groups of qualities, had long occupied his attention; he had accounted for them as terrestrial copies of eternal self-existent Ideas; and now that he had come to represent the Ideas as modifications of the Same by successive combinations with the Other placed visibly before our eyes in the heavenly spheres, it was as copies, however imperfect and distorted, of those spheres that he conceived the inhabitants of earth, as effluxes of their glory and revelations of their power, passing down by a series of degradations from perfect definiteness to something almost indistinguishable from the formless inane. Being mere images and created, or rather, if the expression be permitted, *become* things, they do not, like the heavenly bodies, possess a certain portion of space in perpetuity, but are always drifting about from place to place.<sup>2</sup> And as they

<sup>1</sup> The opposition here is between *γένεσις* and *οὐσία*; in the *Timæus* it is between *γένεσις* and *ὄν* (52 D), a clear proof that Plato uses *οὐσία* and *ὄν* as equivalent and convertible terms.

<sup>2</sup> So I understand the difficult words (*Tim.*, 52 C), *ἐπίπερ οὐδ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐφ' ᾧ γέγονεν αὐτῆς ἐστίν, ἐτέρου δέ τινος, αἶε φέρεται φάντασμα*, which

are dissociated from space, so space must be conceived or rather dimly imagined as dissociated from them, but as ready to assume the form of each in turn. By a curious illusion of the inward sense it is indeed represented as a partaker in their restlessness, as swaying about from one to another (52 D-E).<sup>1</sup>

It is this ascription of motion to what Parmenides had more justly described as absolutely immovable that makes the account of space in the *Timæus* so difficult to realise. In truth space was to Plato without reflexion what long reflexion has made it to the modern psychologist, not so much an infinite aggregate of coexistences as an infinite possibility of movement; while again this conception lapses into the conception of matter as at once the subject of movement and the object of sensation. For it is by the imposition of various geometrical figures on pure unformed space that he imagines the primary molecules of matter to have arisen; and he explains the elementary properties of matter as modes of motion due to the violent oscillations of space acting on particles of different sizes and shapes, aided as would seem by the pressure resulting from the rotation of the celestial sphere; and it is by the impact of these particles on our bodily organs that sensations are produced (52 E, 58 A, 61 C *sqq.*).

We are now in a better position to consider what has become of the outstanding antithetical couple, Rest and Motion, in the readjusted economy of our philosopher's ultimate ideas. As an antithesis it would seem to have been merged in the Same and the Other. We may, if we choose, very appropriately think of Rest as the eternally self-identical, of Motion as the eternally self-differentiating principle in things.<sup>2</sup> But it would be truer to say that in this instance the antithetical relation has passed out of sight. Where there is an antithesis there is, at least for Greek

Mr. Archer-Hind seems to me to have entirely misapprehended. I can make nothing of Jowett's translation, 'an image not possessing that of which the image is, and existing ever as the changing shadow of some other,' except that the peculiar force of *φέρεται* seems to have been missed. The intricate, not to say contorted phraseology of the whole passage gives one the impression that Plato wished to disguise from others and even from himself the extent to which he had abandoned his old transcendentalism for a theory more in consonance with ordinary experience.

<sup>1</sup> In the above interpretation I have tried to combine what is true in Teichmüller's view (*Studien zur Geschichte der Begriffe*, p. 328) with the generally accepted view that *χώρα* means empty space.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed as much is intimated in *Tim.*, 57 E.

notions, an opposite valuation; and it would be against all Platonic usage not to class Rest as a supreme good. Yet in the *Timæus* Motion seems to occupy a very honourable position as an essential attribute of the cosmic bodies and even of the human soul, which is represented as imitating their revolutions and as being enabled to reason only by perpetually returning on itself. Nor can this view be put aside as part of the mythological machinery by which purely spiritual relations are illustrated; for in the *Phædrus* and again in the *Laws* the soul is described as ever-moving and self-moved, while the Eleatic Stranger of the *Sophist* declares motion to be inseparable from being (245 C, 896 A, 248 E). In all these instances, however, if I am not mistaken, we are to think of Motion not as absolute, but as combined with Rest. The possibility of a direct union between the two had been suggested in the *Sophist* and provisionally rejected, but with a hint that the question might be reopened on a more suitable occasion.<sup>1</sup> And now in the *Timæus* the solution seems to have been found. May we not say that Rest and Motion are combined in the perfectly uniform revolutions of the starry sphere (or rather of the whole world) on its axis, of the lesser spheres on their axes, and to a less extent, that is with a preponderance of the inferior element, in all the other periodic cycles of nature? If so another abstract opposition has been reconciled in the actuality of concrete existence.

Reference has just been made to the intimate association between psychic activity and movement. The notion is peculiar to Plato's later dialogues—assuming the *Phædrus* to have been written after the *Republic*<sup>2</sup>—and reaches its extreme development in *Laws* (book x.), where an evil soul is postulated as the cause of irregular movements. The analogy with Zoroastrianism at once suggests itself, but is probably accidental. Where Plato is writing for a popular audience, as in the *Laws*, the introduction of moral values in connexion with physical speculations must not be taken too seriously. The significant thing is the thoroughgoing identification of soul with the cause of physical motion, with what modern science until recently called Force, or even with motion itself, considered as the result of impact and

<sup>1</sup> 256 B, with Prof. Lewis Campbell's note.

<sup>2</sup> Lutoslawski, *op. cit.*, p. 348. The absolute dates assigned by M. Lutoslawski to the *Republic* and the *Phædrus* are in my opinion much too early; and as regards the latter I do not see what support he gets from Thompson; but the important thing is the determination of their relative date, and there I agree with him.



pressure, and the merely secondary reference to feeling and thought. We can hardly suppose that Plato attributed the disturbance of one stone by another—which is an instance of what he calls irregular motion—to the direct action of Satan, or whatever else the 'evil soul' is to be called. The question is rather how far he really attributed conscious intelligence to the animating principles of the celestial bodies. We seem to be dealing with a stage of reflexion where spiritualism and materialism, monism and dualism are still very imperfectly differentiated.

Physic from metaphysic takes defence  
And metaphysic calls for aid on sense.

Space, matter, motion, force, life, soul and reason form a continuous series, our interpretation of which largely depends on the term that we choose to take as the keynote of the whole system. And there is at least one indication going to prove that the idealist view will not bear being too strictly pressed. But here the question, already a sufficiently intricate one, becomes still more complicated by its connexion with the doctrine of final causes.

Plato distinguishes between teleological and mechanical causation, an opposition which has survived into modern philosophy. With him as with us the distinction lies between intelligent action for a pre-determined purpose and blind obedience to physical necessity. But at the very outset a difference presents itself between his point of view and ours, which incidentally illustrates the extreme caution needed in the comparative study of ancient and modern thought. For when we follow the parallel into detail what seemed a resemblance becomes a contrast. The spiritualism of Athens is the materialism of to-day. The immutable uniformity, the eternal self-repetition which we associate with blind mechanical causation and which has found its most general expression in the doctrine of the Conservation of Energy, is with Plato the end itself, and its presence the very sign of a purpose fulfilled. He sees in the revolutions of the starry heavens, in what he calls the circle of the Same, the most complete success of designing intelligence, the supreme victory of the assimilative over the differentiating power. And it is by the wayward incalculable movements of the molecules from which the four elements, fire, air, earth and water, are built up, of these elements themselves and of the organisms which they nourish that the reign of necessity is best represented. But in the interest of the present argument what concerns us most to

notice is that in direct opposition to this theory of matter he elsewhere describes two of the four elements, fire and earth, as existing for the sole purpose of being perceived by sight and touch; while the other two, air and water, are there merely to connect those extremes by harmonious mathematical proportions (31 B *sqq.*). In other words matter does not, as with Berkeley, exist through perception, but in order that it may be perceived by our senses, and therefore it takes the form of fire and earth, an antithetical couple with the usual mediating links. And now comes the very significant detail to which attention is invited. Plato tells us that the heavenly bodies were composed chiefly of fire, and the sun (as would seem) entirely of that element in order that he might illuminate the whole heaven, and that by studying his revolutions the living beings to whom such knowledge is appropriate might learn arithmetic, and through arithmetic attain to the ideas of Identity and Difference. By the way it is rather remarkable that Plato in his increasing fanaticism for logic and mathematics should completely ignore the sun's life-giving power on which he had particularly dwelt in the *Republic*. But to return: besides their bodies of fire, the sun and the other celestial orbs have souls constituted by the twofold movement that animates them, a movement of axial rotation representing the form of Identity, and a retrograde movement of revolution round the centre of the whole cosmic sphere in a circle inclined to the celestial equator, representing the form of Difference. The fiery body is apparently devoid of sensibility, and exists only that it may illustrate an object-lesson in natural law for intelligent beings, *i.e.*, ourselves. Is it likely then that the movements which it makes manifest should be constituted or accompanied by consciousness? especially if, as there seems every reason to believe, the movements are such as could be performed without the intervention of intelligence and will.<sup>1</sup>

To unravel this tangled skein of thought, two points must

<sup>1</sup>The same ambiguity is exhibited, but with much greater clearness in Aristotle's cosmology, where two independent explanations are offered of the celestial motions, either of which would render the other superfluous. The one, which may be called physical, represents the quintessential matter of which the heavens are composed as naturally moving in a circle without ever stopping, whereas fire rises and earth falls until they come to rest on reaching their respective places at the circumference and centre of the sublunary sphere. The other or metaphysical explanation (adopted by Dante) is that the heavenly orbs are animated by conscious spirits which move them round in love and emulation of the eternal self-thinking thought, itself unmoved, on which all nature hangs (*De Coelo*, i., 2; *Phys.*, viii., 10; *Metaph.* xii., 7 and 8).

be borne in mind. The first is that, as has been already observed, Plato's object in writing the *Timæus* was not merely to explain what the world is, but also to explain how it can be known. The second is that according to the unanimous tradition of Greek philosophy like can only be known by like. Plato accepted this leading, and it probably had a good deal to do with his preference for the category of identity in the construction of an intelligible universe. He had explained the heavens as a series of repetitions and imitations; he had now to bring human life under the same law, and accordingly he bends every effort towards establishing an equation between nature and man.

There does not at first sight seem to be a very striking resemblance or even analogy between the body of man and the world that he inhabits or between his mind and the principles by which that world is moved; but our logician gets over the difficulty in the following ingenious manner. The essential part of a human being is his head, the abode of reason; the trunk and limbs are mere subsidiary appendages designed to meet the necessity for nutrition and locomotion entailed by his residence in a region of perpetual flux where the loss of old material must be continually made good by the accession of new supplies. Like him the cosmic sphere and the smaller spheres that it encloses are rational animals—indeed they have furnished the pattern on which he is constructed—but being limited to rotatory movements and not subject to waste they can dispense with a locomotory, prehensile, and digestive apparatus. In short they are all head, and our heads are the heavenliest thing about us: but where are their axial and orbital revolutions?

Plato knew that our heads do not turn; and he must have known that when they seem to go round it is the worst possible sign for the orderly functioning of the brain; but he finds a parallel for the circles of the Same and the Other, that is for the diurnal and periodical revolutions of the celestial spheres in the working of a rightly ordered human reason; and he looks to the study of astronomy as a primary means of intellectual and moral discipline in the reformed society of the future. Of course it is all a fantastic way of saying that there is a unity of composition through the whole of nature, and that the steadiness of physical law is a guide to steadiness of reasoning and conduct. Yet no one would have attacked another philosopher with more merciless ridicule had he chosen a phenomenon so suggestive of dizziness as the outward and visible sign of rational reflexion, and the deliberate adoption of such an absurdity can be

explained only by the desire to force an analogy through at all hazards. But we may well ask whether the ascription of consciousness to the world without is to be understood more literally than the ascription of rotatory movement to the world within. With respect, however, to the deification of the heavenly bodies, a practical motive comes into play, which, as Plato grew older, gained increasing ascendancy over his teaching. This was the desire to reconcile his philosophy with the popular faith; partly no doubt in order to escape persecution, but also, and to a greater extent, because he had come to look on a purified theology as the surest sanction of social order.

What remains after allowing the largest possible discount for dialectical accommodation, for myth, for allegory, for religious edification gained at the expense of the old Ionian plain speaking, or of extreme deference to popular fanaticism, is the great thought of identity in difference, the conquering assimilation of the Same in the cosmic order with the Same in the human self, the mystical communion, already affirmed by Heracleitus and Parmenides, to be reaffirmed long afterwards by Kant and Wordsworth, between the starry heavens without and the moral law within. And on a lower or at any rate a different plane, the plane of pure science, the *Timæus* foreshadows one of the most fertile methods of modern inquiry, never used with more searching effect than in our own day, what may be called the method of assimilation, based on the tendency of evolution to make things not more unlike but more like one another.

In tracing the outlines of this philosophy of identity one cannot but be reminded of another *Identitäts-philosophie*, of the fragmentary system which remains as Schelling's only real contribution to the development of modern thought. For the German as for the Greek ontologist the object was to reconcile nature with man; only what the one had just glimpsed as, an antithesis between knowledge and being transforms itself for the other into the profounder antithesis between subject and object. But the method by which both attempt to establish an equation between disparate quantities is substantially the same. It consists in carrying over portions of each to the other side and arranging them in parallel series until a complete analogy of structure has been effected, when the two are boldly declared to be the same, or to reflect one another. For example ('that's Schelling's way!') we may argue that in self-consciousness the subject is its own object, hence there is an identity between the two and these three are one. And with a little ingenuity and

more good-will certain physical concepts may be so manipulated as to play the part of percipient subjects to others standing for perceived objects, while a third set represents the synthesis or 'identity' of the two. Thus the evolution of consciousness does but reflect on a higher plane what was prefigured in the evolution of inorganic matter and of unconscious life.

The substantial identity of mind with its object occupies a much less prominent place in the *Timæus* than in the *Naturphilosophie*. But we can hardly doubt that when Plato set up the Idea of the Same as the ruling principle of cosmic being and of human reason alike he wished the two to be regarded as essentially one. The Same must everywhere be the same with itself. And this method would have the additional recommendation of giving a new meaning and sanction to his habit of conveying philosophical lessons through the vehicle of myth and allegory. For according to his latest interpretation Nature herself is the great allegorist and myth-maker. The consummate and eternal reality of the starry sphere repeats itself on a smaller scale through all the lower spheres, of which our earth is one; on a still smaller scale, with less definite forms and with endless self-reproduction as a substitute for their eternal duration, in the creatures of the lower world. In the *Republic* he had drawn a disparaging contrast between imitation and reality, shadow and substance. He had now learned to think of imitation as the primal reality, the constraint exercised by the Same on the Other, the obedience of the Other to the Same. And perhaps he would have recognised a truer echo of his doctrine in the *répétition universelle* of M. Tarde than in all the hollow declamation of Victor Cousin.

I have already drawn attention to the fact that the Idea of the Good in the *Republic* is, like the Same in the *Timæus*, beyond existence. And the resemblance does not end there. We are told that the Idea of the Good is, like the sun, a source of life no less than of illumination, the author of being no less than of knowledge. Now this, as we have seen, is precisely the part played by the Idea of the Same, the assimilative power of the *Timæus*. It brings order out of chaos in space, it brings knowledge out of confused sensation in consciousness. And we are told that the Good can only be approached through the study of geometry—a method not less indispensable to the apprehension of the Same as Plato conceived it, that is primarily under the form of mathematical equality.

Nevertheless the Good is not the Same. For as the

analysis of the *Philebus* shows, Plato had come to think of the former after a much more concrete and human fashion—approaching very closely to the standpoint of Aristotle's *Ethics*<sup>1</sup>—than that under which it appears in the *Republic*. Like Existence it has passed from the position of an extreme to that of a mean. It is neither pleasure alone nor knowledge alone, but the reconciling synthesis of both, the delighted realisation of ourselves. Accordingly its metal physical functions are now taken over by the more general conception of Identity, which by combining with Difference actualises and reveals itself as an assimilative power. It is this which at once creates the cosmos and enables us to understand it through the consciousness of its essential sameness with ourselves. But neither is the ethical aspect of the absolute Idea forgotten; for Plato significantly reminds us that God, being good, wished everything to resemble Himself (*Tim.* 29 E).

Plato can hardly have been blind to the irreconcilable discrepancies between the *Timæus* and the *Republic*; and there is even reason to believe that he contemplated the preparation of a new and revised edition of the earlier dialogue with the omission of the sections embodying the metaphysical theories which riper reflexion had induced him to abandon as mistaken or incomplete. For without such an assumption the references to the *Republic* in the introductory portion of the *Timæus* can hardly be explained. Nearly the whole of the *Republic* as we now read it takes the form of a conversation originally held between Socrates and two young friends of his, Glaucon and Adeimantus, Plato's brothers, and repeated on the following day by Socrates himself to some person or persons unknown. But in the *Timæus* no mention is made of these young men, and the conversation about the structure of the ideal state is represented as having passed between Socrates and certain other persons not named in the *Republic*, Critias, Timæus, Hermocrates, and a fourth who is not now present. They have met again to continue the discussion; and to refresh their memories Socrates recapitulates the conclusions reached in common on the preceding day, but with the significant omission of all reference to the long philosophical argument extending

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle's sneers at the unpractical nature of Plato's ideal Good show how little the pupil can be trusted as an authority on the final teaching of the master. I have therefore been at no pains to reconcile his version of Platonism with that adopted in the present paper.

from book v., 471 C, to the end of book vii.<sup>1</sup> Partly on account of this omission and partly for other reasons it has been supposed by some that the summary of the *Timæus* refers to an earlier version of the *Republic* than that now extant, written when Plato was comparatively young, and that the philosophical digression was inserted long afterwards as the fruit of his riper years. Such an explanation, however, has become completely untenable in the face of modern researches, showing that no portion of the *Republic* can be dated much earlier than Plato's fiftieth year; while the evolution of his thought, if it followed the order traced out in the present paper, subsequently reached a much higher stage than that represented by the conversation with Glaucon and Adeimantus. I submit then as a not unwarrantable alternative that the later Socrates makes no reference to this conversation because its author had in view an amended version of his great work, possibly on a new plan, and at any rate with a different set of interlocutors, who were to have reserved the subject of ontology for a separate discussion.

The results here arrived at are not perhaps of any great speculative interest. World-thinkers count in the history of philosophy less for what they have actually thought than for what they have been thought to think. Now at the three epochs of his most momentous influence on the human mind, that is during the years that immediately followed his death, during the early Middle Ages, and during the Renaissance Plato passed without question for a Realist in the scholastic sense, for one who attributes a separate existence to Ideas independent of the human mind and independent of the sensible particulars that they inform. In the England of our own time he has come once more to count as a literary and philosophical force of the first order; but he counts as inspiration rather than as authority, and he counts by his earlier rather than by his later works. We have learned from him how the highest culture may be combined with the most strenuous efforts for the amelioration of life, how 'the spectator of all time and all existence' must descend to be an actor in the one time and the one existence that are allotted him to work in while he has the light. And the lesson is happily independent of what his particular opinions

<sup>1</sup> As Mr. Archer-Hind observes, 'its metaphysical teaching is superseded by the more advanced ontology of the *Timæus*' (*The Timæus of Plato*, p. 56 note). I do not, however, understand Mr. Archer-Hind to suggest that a new edition of the *Republic* was in contemplation; and his interpretation of this 'advanced ontology' differs widely from mine.

were and whether we agree with them or not. Yet apart from the value rightly attached by all scholars to truth as such, and from the interest always attached to the correct interpretation of so great a mind as Plato's, it may be urged that the evolution of thought becomes more intelligible when we consent to treat the cosmology of Aristotle—the key to his whole philosophy—as having been moulded far more than he would have liked to admit by the method of a master to whom he was less than just, but from whom he learned the secret of a great achievement, the reconciliation of Parmenides with Heracleitus, the principle of eternal self-identity in the absolute whole with the principle of variety, relativity, antagonism, and mutual dependence in its component parts.