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Period: Paradoxes of the Simile**

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**ABSTRACT**

Plato's *Republic* is popularly known to be the place where he presents his theory of the ideal state. Though this theory bears much weight in the history of political thought, Plato did not think that the state has an ontological status transcending an organization of human individuals. Surprisingly, he considered the state to be an enlarged heuristic model that helps us understand better the human faculties, functions, virtues and limitations. This presentation offers a critique of Plato's first systematic synthesis of epistemology, ontology, psychology, ethics and politics diagrammatically explained in the Simile of the Divided Line given at the end of *Republic* Book VI. The critical points concern Plato's account of intellectual intuition (*noesis*) of the Forms with no explanation of how the human mind can experience this quasi-mystical state, the inconsistency between his view of the societal functions his ideal state requires the three classes to perform and their respective cognitive and practical competences he recognizes, and the dogmatic narrowness of his perspective on the theoretical options competing with his theory on issues that concern him. A question is posed that may have an ad hominem point. Is it not probable that instead of learning from Socrates the view of teaching as midwifery of knowledge Plato himself constructed and attributed it to his mentor because doing so would serve his professional self-interest? This presentation concludes with an assessment of Whitehead's pronouncement that Western philosophy subsequent to Plato can be considered to be a series of footnotes on him and an endorsement of the point Hegel's Absolute Idealism ironically makes, namely, that philosophy can never be concluded into a quietude of fulfillment. as process automation and design optimization for production workflow.

## **Plato's Presentation of a Philosophical System in *Republic***

Plato's *Republic* is popularly known to be the place where he presents his theory of the ideal state. Though his theory bears much weight in the history of political thought, Plato did not think that the state has an ontological status that transcends that of human individuals. More surprisingly, the state is thought by Plato to be an enlarged heuristic model to help us understand philosophical anthropology (ontology of being human) and ethics better [1].

The Simile of the Divided Line given at the end of Book VI of *Republic* is a diagrammatic explanation of his first synthesis of the main branches of philosophy--epistemology, general ontology, philosophical anthropology, psychology, ethics and politics. In a large portion of Dialogue *Republic*, Plato presents his own philosophical thought distilling the earlier Socratic Dialogues including *Apology*, *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, *Cratylus* and *Phaedrus*. His admired mentor Socrates' search for self-knowledge leading to ironic admission of his being the wisest because of his knowledge of own ignorance proved to be an effective strategy that exposed and humiliated pretenders to knowledge and virtue. The Allegory of the Cave given in the very beginning of Book VII of *Republic*, while presupposing the Simile, further explains, laments and memorializes Socrates the heroic sage with righteous indignation at the Athenian mobs who had Socrates condemned and executed for capital crimes of advocating impiety and corrupting the youth. The ambitious Athenian youth and their guardians took vengeance against Socrates who exposed the Sophists, their teachers of rhetorical art, which they needed to learn to succeed in Athenian politics, to be mere pretenders to knowledge and virtue, motivated to collect tuition they charged [2].

### **The Simile**

The Simile diagrammatically explains the connections among the major branches of philosophy. Plato's epistemology separates major stages of cognition, Knowledge (*episteme*) and Opinion (*doksa*) below it. The upper stage of Knowledge is Intellectual Intuition (*noesis*) and the stage below is discursive thinking (*dianoia*). Between Knowledge and Opinion is a gulf for an ascending human soul to cross, Recollection, anamnestic awakening to the subsistence of abstract universals, the Forms, with independence of being exemplified, even of being thought. The upper stage of Opinion is Belief (*pistis*) and its lower stage, the lowest in the hierarchy of all cognitive stages, is Imagining (*eikasia*). The characteristics of the four stages, according to Plato, can be explained only by the consideration of what the epistemic subjects in them are, or are not, aware of, and how. Epistemology and ontology thus become inseparably linked [3].

Platonic Forms are not particulars, sensible or intelligible, but abstract universals. A subject in its learning process must have come to be aware of a

universal by abstracting common properties from resembling objects of intuition, sensible or intelligible. Suppose a subject has sensuously intuited a plurality of red circles in empty space. Does he thereby become aware of a Form? Red Circularity? If he does, is this Form red and circular? That cannot be because a Form cannot be sensible but must be intelligible. Is there an intelligible Form of empty spaces? Plato never explained how Forms of sensible particulars are possible. And suppose there is nothing that is just in the world, no just person, no just deed, and no just institution. But the Form Justice must subsist to make its exemplifications possible. Not long ago the first design and construction of a geodesic dome was celebrated as a historic event. There must be indefinitely many Forms of three-dimensional figures with no exemplifications and no conceptions. These are some of the questions to which clear answers from Plato are wanting: Can there be intelligible Forms of sensible qualities? Is it the case that empirical objects have intelligible qualities that exemplify Forms? What are such qualities, and how do such qualities come to exemplify their Forms? Suppose all persons are unjust. Do they come to have a conception of justice by reflective awareness of their failure to be just, or do they have a conception of Injustice and of Justice as its negation?

Although Plato did not seriously address theological issues before he wrote *Timaeus*, we see there a clash between Plato's theology and the Theory of Forms. God in *Timaeus* is not an omnipotent creator of the cosmos but only a limited fashioner (*demiourgos*) of things out of preexisting matter, the Receptacle. And God must be an exemplification of the Form of God, which implies that omnipotent God is not possible: God cannot create Forms nor can God *be* independently of the Form of God and other Forms. It is understandable that Philo Judaeus, a conservative Jewish theologian, interpreted the Form of God to be God's idea of Himself within His mind. I will circumvent problems that may arise regarding geometrical and arithmetical Forms [4].

### **A Paradox of Intellectual Intuition**

It is one thing to have a theoretical understanding of intellectual intuition of Forms but another to be in such a cognitive state. We should heed the following points. There subsist infinite Forms and infinite propositions about them. Such intuition is comprehensive knowledge of all truths founded on a single unified set of axiomatic principles. It must be a rhapsodic stasis of the soul, a quasi-mystical state that a philosophical subject may yearn to experience. In his *Seventh Letter* to friends of Dion Plato describes his learning experience by saying “a flash understanding of each [issue] blazes up, and the mind, as it exerts all its powers to the limit of human capacity, is flooded with light” at the end of an earnest discourse “without jealousy” [5]. But it is doubtful that the “flash understanding” is an experience of intellectual intuition. One of the crucial reasons is that human consciousness, however extensive its scope at a moment may be, cannot encompass an infinity of objects. It cannot comprehend the infinite even in succession because

the duration of the human subject's existence is finite. Immanuel Kant later presented a theory of the ground of the possibility of a consciousness of a manifold that can be applied in a critique of the possibility of Platonic intellectual intuition. Kant's crucial claim of relevance is that non-sensible, independently real things-in-themselves cannot become objects of human consciousness. Space and time are neither themselves substances, nor attributes of substances, nor accidents of substances, nor relations among substances but *a priori*, subjective forms of intuition of sensible manifolds and pure, *a priori* constructions of numbers and geometrical structures. Intellectual intuition of Platonic Forms is not possible because they are neither objects of possible intuition nor can their infinite totality be encompassed in a finite duration even if they were such objects. The difference between Plato and Kant in ontology and epistemology yields such a result, though, with no further critical consideration, expectedly complex, we should not conclude that we should take Kant's position [6].

### **The Theory of the Ideal State and its Stratification**

Plato's psychology, ethics and politics fit into the Simile. Humans have three major faculties, reason (the rational part), and will (the spirited part) and desire (the appetitive part). There are individuals in whom reason is, as it should be, the dominant faculty. They alone are the wise. In wise people will is directed by reason to execute with courage the decisions reason makes. The Auxiliaries and the Artisans can attain their virtues only with instructions and control respectively. The Auxiliaries are those who lack wisdom but can be instructed by the Guardians to carry out their decisions obediently with courage. The Auxiliaries' societal function is to maintain internal order and defend the state against the threats of external foes. The Artisans, at the nadir of the social hierarchy, would seek to satisfy whatever desires that arise without knowing which ones to satisfy to what limits. They should be controlled by the Auxiliaries who are guided by the Guardians to be temperate. Now it is obvious that the Guardians, and they alone, belong to the epistemological region where they can think of intelligible Forms. The Auxiliaries obviously belong to the sub-anamnestic region of Belief. There is no epistemological region to assign the Artisans to other than Imagining, a stage of cognition with no distinction between the real and images.

### **The Dehumanization of Artisans**

The societal function of the Artisans is material production, such as farming, making tools, and conducting commerce. Plato cannot answer the question how the persons who cannot distinguish between the real and the unreal, the good and the bad, the useful and the useless can fulfill such functions. If Plato could visit this age, he would be surprised and embarrassed

to learn that Artisans nowadays even receive and display doctoral diplomas in agriculture, engineering, or economics, management and commerce.

The possible phylogenetic ascent of every human soul from the lowest stage of cognition, Imagining, to its highest one, Intellectual Intuition, motivated by its inherent psychic force, Eros, contrasts with diverse ontogenetic ceilings individual souls are destined to stay under. Plato's possible reasoning that nature provides the classes of people with fitting deficiencies as well as unenviable aptitudes the state needs for its functional integrity could be characterized as a naive teleological naturalism. Plato's possible argument that the government that considers the state's functional diversity and integrity necessary should devise and implement a policy to create lower classes of farmers and laborers will surely incur an ethical criticism. A claim that the rigorous educational process to which all citizens are subjected to be placed in their proper stations is fair may be countered by the argument that those assigned to lower stations in the winnowing process may already be systemically discriminated against on grounds of race for instance into poor environmental conditions with poor health, lower culture, low self-respect, low self-confidence and lack of aspiration. It is understandable that Karl Popper who by no means failed to recognize brilliant features of Plato's thought saw it fit to include him among the enemies of open society [7].

### **Teaching as Midwifery of Knowledge**

Socrates had a humble origin: he was born of a stone mason and a midwife. He must have apprenticed in masonry before he chanced to find wealthy aristocratic patrons like Plato whose support enabled him to absorb himself in philosophical activity. The following is a plausible hypothesis: Plato's recognition of the power of Socrates' dialectic fortified by his ironic assertion of his knowledge of own ignorance that devastated the pretentious Sophists whom Plato no doubt detested at least as much as his mentor Socrates saw advantage in supporting the theory of teaching as midwifery of knowledge. Plato, according to this hypothesis, did not learn this pedagogical theory from Socrates but constructed it himself and attributed it to Socrates; Plato wanted to use that theory to support his claim that he learned the substance of his philosophy for himself. There is ample textual evidence that Plato dissociated Socrates from the doctrines proffered in his later Dialogues including *Theaetetus*, *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, *Laws* and *Timaeus*. This hypothesis makes an *ad hominem* point that Plato had professional self-interest as many other thinkers do. In refining dialectic into the standard method of philosophical reasoning, Socrates espoused the ontology of humans as essentially rational being whose wisdom unifies all virtues including courage and temperance. Granted that in *Phaedo* Plato intended to depict Socrates his admired teacher in his existential extremity of preparing for his death by execution in attributing to him arguments for immortality the cogency of which was questionable. Plato could not have been dishonest in attributing

to Socrates a belief, rather faith, that he had an immortal immaterial soul with rationality as its essence. If Plato's description of Socrates is correct, Socrates, who taught his students fundamental principles of ontology, epistemology and ethics, would not have held that a teacher transmits no substantive knowledge to students. The hypothesis carries an *ad hominem* critical point that Plato on one hand honestly admitted Socrates' transmission of foundational philosophical principles to his students including Plato himself, but Plato on the other hand attributed to Socrates the theory of teaching as midwifery of knowledge so that he, Plato, could claim to have learned his own philosophical system for himself out of professional self-interest [8].

### **Internal Difficulties and Inadequacies**

Paradoxes are internal difficulties. Plato's view that intellectual intuition of infinite forms is the ideal acme of the ascent of the soul is paradoxical because such intuition turns out to be humanly impossible. Besides the argument that no one can have intellectual intuition of the Forms, there is a practical reason why the Guardians, the wisest class of persons, who alone are qualified to govern the state, can understand the structure of intellectual intuition but cannot be in it because governing is handling empirical situations that exemplify Forms, not the Forms themselves. The Auxiliaries belong to Belief, the upper region of Opinion that is pre-amnestic. They lack knowledge but can be educated to execute decisions made by Guardians faithfully with courage. What is important, they are capable of expressing in language their belief regarding what is real and what is not, and what is just and what is not. If the Auxiliaries were asked what makes the words "real" and "just" meaningful they could not give a Platonic answer, i.e., that general words are meaningful because they refer to the Forms of real things and just things respectively. Plato would be surprised if the Auxiliaries were to give a nominalist account, saying that general words apply to resembling particulars: "real" applies to their cat that is different from a toy cat, or that "just" applies to a person paying the price charged for a thing he is buying at a store contrasted with a person shoplifting an item off a store shelf and leaving the store. Live cats, and accepted commercial transaction resemble, as do toy cats and shoplifting do. The critical note here is that the Platonic Realist account of the significance of general words is only one of several vying options, that Plato's system, at no phase of its development, addresses the fundamental general philosophical question of how a meaningful language can arise with what ontological and epistemological support. Plato's omission of a treatment of the issue is not an internal difficulty of his system already constructed; it rather is the presence of a lacuna in it. Though Plato's Dialogue *Cratylus* that focuses on the fit of onomatopoeic words to their original referents in the Greek language is illuminating, the Dialogue hardly gives an adequate thematic and systematic account of linguistics covering phonetics, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and culture-specific conventions and their changes over time. The fact that none of

the participants in the dialogue shows interest in what comparative linguistics can teach them about linguistic families because of their prejudice that Greek is the only language worth studying is striking [9].

## Conclusion

Alfred North Whitehead's statement that Western philosophy subsequent to Plato is but a footnote on him is a correct encomium insofar as the philosophical issues Plato addressed were of such importance as no honest philosophical communicants with Plato could ignore and the legacy of his thought had the magnetism to draw later philosophers into a critical reflection upon his views [10]. But Whitehead's statement would be incorrect if it also meant that subsequent Western philosophy generated no new problems, new perspective or new doctrines. Plato and his countless pupils all draw from and contribute to *philosophia perennis*. Philosophy is an activity of thinkers existing in nature and in culture for a finite duration the record of which is left for the future generations to interpret and appropriate. A doctrinal synthesis that completely actualizes the intellectual potency of the human mind must be an illusion. No sooner did Hegel build his system of Absolute Idealism to end philosophy, that is, to completely fulfill its inherent mission, than it gave rise to rebellious doctrines including Neo-Kantianism, Dialectical Materialism, Phenomenology, Existentialism, and various forms of deconstructionism being audibly advocated even today. Hegel merits humorous praise for saving philosophy from its self-indulgent quietude he may have intended by revitalizing it instead [11].

## Citations and Notes

[1] I do not believe that *The Republic* explains why the state comes into being. It asks what the qualifications of its rulers are. Intellectual and moral virtue, wisdom, is the qualifier. The wise, Guardians, who alone are so qualified operate in a perfectly democratic way and they by disposition are so reluctant to assume the kingship that they compel the one selected by a lot to do so. With his keen sense of the contrast between the real and the ideal, Plato must be implying that people like the Guardians in the ideal republic can rarely be found in the real world. An intelligent ruler Dionysus II of Syracuse, whom, with his uncle Dion, Plato fancied training into a philosopher king, turned out to be a clever tyrant as expected. Philosophical thinking seeks to attain knowledge of the norms; the question of whether and how, with what practical means, the norms can be realized is for a different, empirical, discipline to handle. Platonic thinking thus opposes all forms of naturalistic value theory. Plato starts a dispute in value theory that would persist through centuries, with no resolution even today. The whole *Seventh Letter* should be read to catch Plato's sense of the chasm between the norm and the distant reality. In Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato including the Letters*, distributed by Pantheon



- Books, a Division of Random House, N.Y., 1961. *The Letters* translated by L. A. Post, 323e-352a.
- [2] In Hamilton and Cairns, eds., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato including the Letters, The Republic*, Book VII, 514a-517a.
- [3] In Edith Hamilton & Huntington Cairns, eds., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato including the Letters* 1961, Distributed by Pantheon Books, a Division of Random House, N.Y., Plato, *The Republic*, an English translation by Paul Shorey (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA and London, in 2 vols, 1953 and 1956). Book VI, 509<sup>d</sup>-511<sup>e</sup>, 745-747; Book VII, 514<sup>a</sup>-517<sup>a</sup>. There is no doubt that in *The Republic* the Form of the Good, compared to the bright Sun that almost blinds the cave man who manages to liberate himself from the condition of seeing over the cave wall the flickering images of the marionettes manipulated by outside puppeteers is meant to be the supreme Form. If the interpretation of this metaphor is that Goodness is the Form of all Forms including itself, we can see the advancement of Plato's theory of Forms in his later Dialogues beyond *Republic*. In *Sophist*, Being, Identity and Difference are Forms of Themselves, of one another, and of all other lesser Forms. There is no evidence here that the idea of the supremacy of Goodness is withdrawn, however. The *Sophist* doctrine can be revised to say that Goodness, Being, Identity and Difference are coequal Forms such that they are Forms of Themselves, of one another, and all other lesser Forms. But the ontological parity of Goodness with Being, Identity and Difference does not negate the truth that Goodness is the rationale for the reality of all Forms including Goodness Itself. Hamilton and Cairns, eds., *Republic* Bk. VII, 514a -517a; *Sophist* 254b-259a.
- [4] [www.britannica.com/biography/Philo-Judaeus/Originality-of-his-thought](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Philo-Judaeus/Originality-of-his-thought)
- [5] *The Seventh Letter*, in Hamilton and Cairns, *ibid.*, 344a.
- [6] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, ed., by Lewis White Beck. The Library of Liberal Arts (Indianapolis & New York, 1950). Sections 6-13.
- [7] Popper, Karl; Ryan, Alan; Gombrich, E.H. (2013). *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013). Ontology, epistemology, moral philosophy, and political philosophy were the main thematic concerns of Plato. He had beliefs about the patterns or laws of human history but such beliefs never overshadowed his main concerns. Popper's attribution of "teleological historicism" to Plato may have ground but his assessment of Plato as a theorist of history seems to be a perspectival error.
- [8] A.E. Taylor, *Socrates: The Man and His Thought* (Doubleday Anchor Book, 1952). Entire. *Phaedo*, tr. by Hugh Tredennick, in Hamilton and Cairns, eds., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Entire.
- [9] *Cratylus*, tr. by Benjamin Jowett, in Hamilton and, eds., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Bollingen Series LXXI, Pantheon Books (New York: Random House, 1961). 383a-440e.
- [10] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 39 (Free Press, 1979): "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."
- [11] Hegel's Absolute Idealism is an unprecedented apotheosis of pure reason, though its resemblance to Spinoza's monism is not inappropriate. Kant conceived things-in-themselves as unknowable realities with problematic noumenal determinations that make them serve practical purposes in ethics and philosophy of religion.

Hegel daringly defies the epistemological restraint of Kant's transcendental idealism to declare that the Absolute Spirit has actualized its dialectically ordered notional essence through time, so that the cosmic history becomes the process of the self-actualization of the Absolute Spirit; human spirits enlightened by a shared understanding of this truth constructs and lives a culture of fulfillment. Though Hegel considers Christianity to be the Absolute Religion, the transcendent theist, creationist Judeo-Christian view cannot approve Hegel's pantheist or panentheist metaphysics. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. By A.V. Miller with analysis of the text and forward by J.N. Findlay (Oxford Uni. Press, 1977). Sections 805-808.