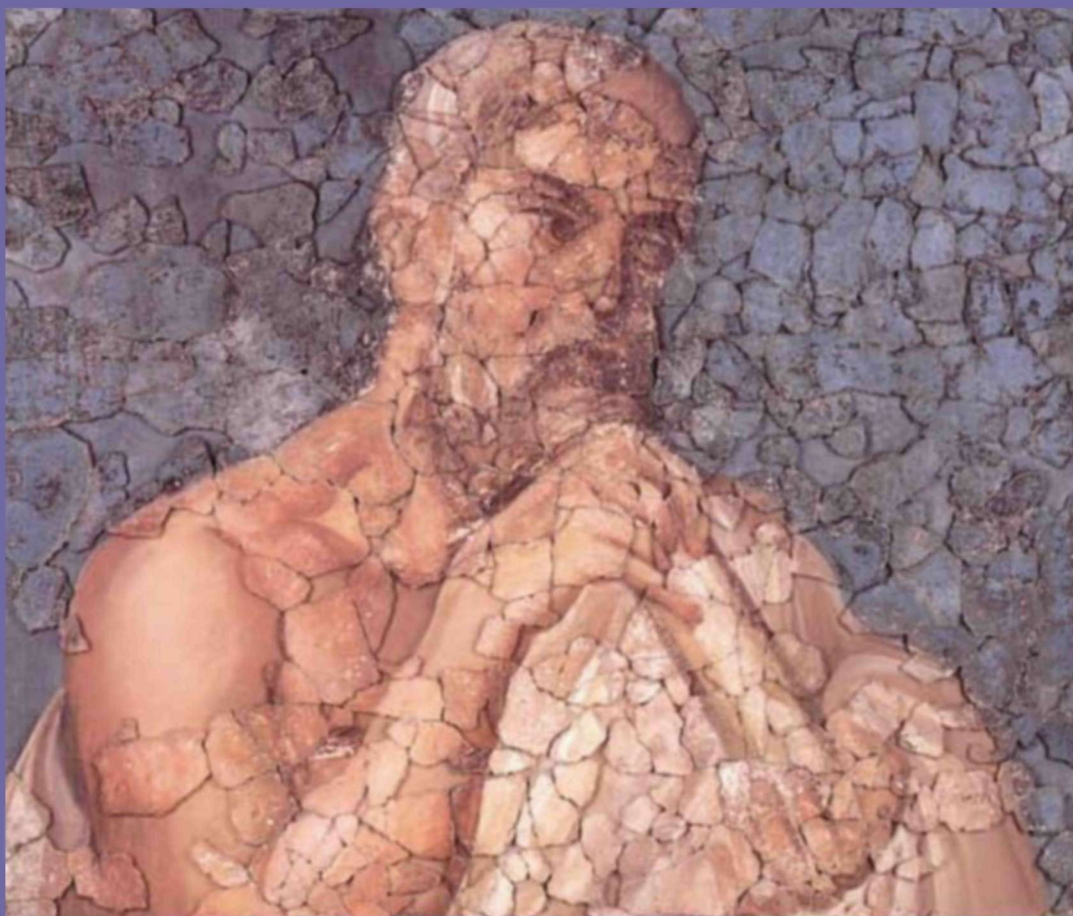


*The  
Cambridge Companion  
to*

# Greek and Roman Philosophy



EDITED BY  
DAVID SEDLEY

## 4 Plato

### THE PLATONIC CORPUS

From any perspective, Plato's dialogues are extraordinary. Others have tried to write philosophical dialogues, frequently in imitation of his. Indeed other associates of Socrates had already used the genre before Plato adopted it; bits and pieces, along with titles, remain. But the *Platonic* dialogues remain essentially *sui generis*, whether taken singly or as a whole. There are somewhere between twenty-five and thirty-five genuine works which, while always returning to ethics and politics, between them cover a vast range of topics, and cover them in often startlingly different ways; always, however, using a cast of characters that excludes the author, even in disguise. A main feature is that they define – and would later be taken as having defined – what philosophy itself is, not just in terms of its subject-matter but in terms of method and attitude or approach. This they do chiefly by exhibiting philosophy in action; or rather, typically, by exhibiting a philosopher – usually Socrates – going about his business, often in confrontation with others (teachers of rhetoric, sophists, politicians, poets) who dealt with the same subject-matter but in different, non-philosophical ways.

Quite what this thing 'philosophy' is, on Plato's account, will emerge in due course. First, it will be helpful to review the extent of the corpus, the parts of which are laid out below in an ancient ordering. (The ordering – at least of the first thirty-six items, arranged in nine 'tetralogies' – is probably due to the Platonist Thrasyllus of Alexandria in the first century AD.)

*Diagram A: The contents of the Platonic corpus*

Approximate lengths are given in 'Stephanus' pages. These are the page numbers of the several volumes of Henri Estienne's 1574 edition of Plato, used by all modern editions and translations to provide a standard referencing system. (Each Stephanus page – see p. 17 – is divided into five sections, a–e; however, line numbers within sections are frequently specific to particular editions, so may vary.) One Stephanus page typically contains around 530 words, slightly more than the equivalent of one page of this book. Alternative titles, and some obscurer but regularly used abbreviations are given in square brackets.

**Diagram A**

Title	Topic	Main speaker(s)	Pages
1 <i>Euthyphro</i>	On piety	Socrates	14
2 <i>Apology</i>	Defence speeches at trial, re-created (not a dialogue)	Socrates	25
3 <i>Crito</i>	On the citizen and the law	Socrates	12
4 <i>Phaedo</i> ( <i>Phd.</i> , <i>Phdo</i> )	On the soul: does it survive death?	Socrates	61
5 <i>Cratylus</i>	On the relationship of language to reality	Socrates	58
6 <i>Theaetetus</i> ( <i>Tht.</i> )	Three formally unsuccessful attempts to define knowledge	Socrates	69
7 <i>Sophist</i>	(Sequel to <i>Theaetetus</i> .) What is a sophist? Falsity, not-being	Visitor from Elea	53
8 <i>Statesman</i> ( <i>Politicus</i> , <i>Pol.</i> , <i>Plt.</i> )	(Sequel to <i>Sophist</i> .) What is it to be a statesman?	Visitor from Elea	55

(cont.)

(cont.)

Title	Topic	Main speaker(s)	Pages
9 <i>Parmenides</i>	On 'Forms'; with philosophical training exercises	Parmenides (from Elea), Socrates	41
10 <i>Philebus</i> ( <i>Phlb.</i> )	On pleasure and the good; method	Socrates	57
11 <i>Symposium</i>	On <i>erōs</i> (passionate love); speeches at a drinking party held at Agathon's house	Aristophanes, Agathon, Socrates, Alcibiades et al.	52
12 <i>Phaedrus</i> ( <i>Phdr.</i> )	On <i>erōs</i> (passionate love) and the art of <i>logoi</i> (speaking and writing)	Socrates	53
13 <i>Alcibiades</i> ( <i>First Alcibiades</i> , <i>Alc. I</i> )	A kind of introduction to Platonic philosophy?	Socrates	32
14 <i>Second Alcibiades</i> ( <i>Alc. II</i> )	A miniature version of <i>Alcibiades</i> ?	Socrates	14
15 <i>Hipparchus</i>	On greed	Socrates	8
16 ( <i>Rival</i> ) <i>Lovers</i>	On knowledge and authority	Socrates	7
17 <i>Theages</i>	On Socrates and his 'divine sign'	Socrates	10
18 <i>Charmides</i>	On <i>sōphrosynē</i> ('self-control?')	Socrates	24
19 <i>Laches</i>	On courage	Socrates	23
20 <i>Lysis</i>	On 'love' (or 'friendship': <i>philia</i> ) and human motivation	Socrates	20



<b>Title</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Main speaker(s)</b>	<b>Pages</b>
21 <i>Euthydemus</i> ( <i>Euthyd.</i> , <i>Eud.</i> )	Philosophy meets 'eristic' sophistry	Socrates	37
22 <i>Protagoras</i>	On knowledge and excellence/virtue: philosopher meets sophist	Socrates, Protagoras	53
23 <i>Gorgias</i>	On rhetoric: philosopher meets sophist (Gorgias) and pupils	Socrates	81
24 <i>Meno</i>	On excellence/virtue, and whether it can be taught	Socrates	30
25 <i>Greater Hippias</i> ( <i>Hippias Major</i> , <i>Hi. Ma.</i> )	On beauty/fineness: philosopher meets sophist	Socrates	24
26 <i>Lesser Hippias</i> ( <i>Hippias Minor</i> , <i>Hi. Mi.</i> )	Better to go wrong deliberately or without meaning to?	Socrates	14
27 <i>Ion</i>	On poets, poetry, knowledge: philosopher meets rhapsode (performer of epic)	Socrates	12
28 <i>Menexenus</i> ( <i>Mx.</i> )	A funeral oration (said to come from Aspasia, Pericles' mistress)	Socrates	16
29 <i>Clitopho</i>	On Socrates' shortcomings as teacher	Clitopho	5
30 <i>Republic</i> ( <i>Rep.</i> , <i>Resp.</i> )	On whether justice pays; construction of an idealized city; tripartite soul; theory of education	Socrates	295 (in 10 books)

(cont.)

(cont.)

Title	Topic	Main speaker(s)	Pages
31 <i>Timaeus</i>	An early Athenian 'history'; the cosmos and the origins of mankind	Timaeus (mostly a monologue)	76
32 <i>Critias</i>	(Fragment, continuing <i>Timaeus</i> .) Ancient Athens' defeat of Atlantis	Critias	16
33 <i>Minos</i>	On the nature of law	Socrates	9
34 <i>Laws</i> ( <i>Leges, Leg., Lg.</i> )	An imaginary city constructed, with legal system and theory; extended theological excursus in book x	An Athenian visitor to Crete	345 (in 12 books)
35 <i>Epinomis</i>	(Appendix to <i>Laws</i> .) On wisdom, and how it is to be achieved by the governing council of the city	The Athenian visitor (as in <i>Laws</i> )	20
36 <i>Letters</i> ( <i>Epist., Ep.</i> )	[Ranging from one fifth of a page to 28 pages]	Plato (alleged author)	55 (13 letters)
37 <i>Definitions</i>	Some Academic definitions of philosophically important items		6
38 <i>On Justice</i>	Various questions about justice	Socrates	3
39 <i>On Virtue</i>	Can virtue be taught?	Socrates	4
40 <i>Demodocus</i>	A small collection of Academic discussions?	Socrates	7
41 <i>Sisyphus</i>	On knowledge and deliberation	Socrates	5

Title	Topic	Main speaker(s)	Pages
42 <i>Halcyon</i>	Interpretation of a myth	Socrates	[2]
43 <i>Eryxias</i>	Is money a good thing?	Socrates	14
44 <i>Axiochus</i>	On the prospect of death	Socrates	8

With probably or certainly spurious items removed, the list looks like this, in a fairly standard modern ordering:

*Diagram B: A standard modern ordering of the undoubtedly genuine Platonic works*

#### Diagram B

##### **Early** (alphabetical order)

*Apology, Charmides, Crito, Euthyphro, Gorgias, Lesser Hippias, Ion, Laches, Protagoras, Republic (Book I); plus ('transitional?') Euthydemus, Greater Hippias, Lysis, Menexenus, Meno*

##### **Middle** (suggested chronological order)

*Cratylus, Phaedo, Symposium, Republic (Books II–X), Phaedrus, Parmenides, Theaetetus*

##### **Late** (suggested chronological order)

*Timaeus–Critias, Sophist, Statesman, Philebus, Laws*

Or, in the ordering given by mainly nineteenth-century studies of Plato's style ('stylometry'), which begin from the reasonably firmly established fact that *Laws* was written last:

*Diagram C: The undoubtedly genuine Platonic works as grouped according to purely stylistic criteria*

Each group, until the last-placed *Laws*, is in alphabetical order.

**Diagram C****Group I** (presumed earlier)

*Apology, Charmides, Cratylus, Crito, Euthydemus, Euthyphro, Gorgias, Greater Hippias, Lesser Hippias, Ion, Laches, Lysis, Menexenus, Meno, Phaedo, Protagoras, Symposium*

**Group II** (presumed transitional to later dialogues)

*Phaedrus, Parmenides, Republic, Theaetetus*

**Group III** (later):

*Philebus, Sophist, Statesman, Timaeus–Critias, Laws*

## PLATO'S LIFE

Diagram B makes more ambitious claims than Diagram C about the shape of the corpus, by connecting it with a particular view about the way Plato's thought developed; that is, by ordering the dialogues at least partly according to 'doctrinal' content. Two theses in particular have been seen by modern scholars as relevant to establishing relative dates of composition. One is the thesis that the soul has three parts or aspects, the relevance and importance of which for issues of dating will be discussed on pp. 120–2 below. The other thesis is about the existence of a special set of entities collectively called 'Forms' (*eidē*) or 'Ideas' (*ideai*) that lie beyond ordinary phenomenal existence. This thesis is so fundamental to any reading of Plato that it requires immediate introduction, but in any case a basic understanding of the concept of a Platonic 'Form' is needed for the argument of the present section.

What, then, are Platonic Forms? This is not an easy question to answer. One reason is that Plato never presents us with a single, comprehensive account of the 'theory' (as scholars frequently call it) – that is not his style (see especially p. 108 below). Another is that he may perhaps not have anything stable enough to be called a 'theory' at all (pp. 113–19 below). But this much one can say. Forms

are, first of all, those things that the philosopher aims to grasp when he or she attempts to understand anything important, whether goodness, or beauty, or justice (i.e. what it is to be good, beautiful, or just), or the cosmos as a whole (see p. 109 below). Secondly, each Form is what explains, is even cause of, those particular things at the phenomenal level that share its name, and 'participate in' or 'resemble' it. But, thirdly, Forms exist independently, not only of particular, phenomenal things but also of minds, whether human or divine. They can be pictured as located in some region beyond the reach of the senses, although in fact they are non-spatial and non-temporal, as well as non-corporeal. Insofar as they are eternal, they are themselves divine; and unlike phenomenal objects, which change and come into and pass out of existence, they are and remain exactly what they are, thus representing an appropriately stable set of objects for knowledge. Aristotle, looking back from the perspective of his own views, tends to treat Platonic Forms simply as objects of definition, universals, that have been mistakenly 'separated' from particulars, but the true picture will certainly have been more complicated. In different contexts in Plato, Forms have different faces: sometimes they do indeed look like universals, but perhaps more often they look like ideal paradigms or limiting cases (as e.g. when particulars are said to 'resemble' them); sometimes they may plausibly be interpreted as an underlying ordered structure resembling a set of physical laws (see p. 110 below).

For present purposes, however, what matters is that it is the perceived moment, or process, of the introduction of Forms as clearly independent of, and prior to, particulars that primarily determines the shape and membership of the group of dialogues called 'middle' in Diagram B. On the view that this diagram represents (a view which by contrast generally downplays the importance, in this or any other context, of the introduction of the tripartite soul), the early or 'Socratic' dialogues make no significant metaphysical commitments. But then, in the 'middle' dialogues, Plato moves decisively away from his teacher, to develop – among other things – the hallmark, 'classical', theory of Forms. The shift from 'middle' to 'late', too, has frequently been seen as an extension of the same story: now Plato allegedly starts to have doubts about, or even rejects, the 'classical' idea of Forms (see pp. 115, 116 below, on the *Parmenides*), along with other constructions of the 'middle' period.

This reading is undoubtedly psychologically plausible, but is rather weakly supported. For example, while Diagram C is compatible with Diagram B, it falls short of corroborating it: three of the main 'middle' dialogues, *Cratylus*, *Phaedo* and *Symposium*, actually belong to the first stylistic group. A second and perhaps more serious consideration is that we have hardly any reliable and independent evidence about the way Plato's life and thinking developed; and to infer – in the way the proposed reading does, almost entirely – from the dialogues' content to the history of the creative mind behind it comes dangerously close to the methods of the ancient biographers, who with hard facts unavailable tended to fill out anecdotal evidence with whatever it seemed plausible to derive from the corpus.

Nonetheless, as we shall see (pp. 119–22 below), a modified evolutionary or 'developmental' model of interpretation remains a useful – perhaps even necessary – alternative to the opposite, or 'unitarian', pole of interpretation, even granted that the latter would in itself be perfectly compatible with the stylometrists' discoveries (Diagram C). The unitarian tendency, treating the corpus as a more or less static unity, was in fact the norm until the modern period, which in terms of the interpretation of Plato begins in the nineteenth century. Despite this, 'developmentalism' too has historical roots of a sort (in Aristotle), and in any case it would surely be surprising if someone who lived and thought – philosophically – until the age of about eighty did not sometimes find it necessary to change his views.

The important things we know for sure about the author of the works collected under the name 'Plato' are roughly these: that he was born in the early 420s BC to a wealthy father by the name of Ariston (his mother's name is in some doubt); that he had a close relationship, at least on an intellectual level, with Socrates; that he spent the larger part of his life in Athens, without interference from the authorities despite the profoundly anti-democratic nature of his extensive political writing; that he founded a philosophical 'school', the Academy, which was to survive as an institution for research and reflection, and for teaching, for at least three centuries; that from 367 until his death, he had Aristotle with him in the Academy; and that he died in 347.<sup>1</sup> Later chapters in this volume will deal with the fortunes of Platonism in its various forms, and, most immediately, with Aristotle, who was in many ways the most faithful Platonist of them all, despite some central points of disagreement. However

elusive Plato may be, and have been, from a biographer's point of view, there is no doubting the difference he made, as a single individual, to the history of philosophy. Even Stoicism, that great rival of Platonism in the early days of both, can be detected rifling Platonic dialogues to provide material for its own systematic constructions.

FORMS, THE PHENOMENAL WORLD, AND  
PHILOSOPHY'S SEARCH FOR THE GOOD: SOME  
CENTRAL PLATONIC IDEAS

Astonishingly, we appear to have all the works that Plato ever wrote and wanted read. The dialogues are also the first complete philosophical works that we possess from the ancient world; practically everything from before then, and much of what comes after, we have only in the form of fragments. In terms of preservation Plato fared much better even than the three canonical Athenian tragedians, only a selection of whose work survived (Aristotle did better in terms of volume, but only because he wrote more). This by itself is testimony to Plato's importance for later generations. Even those works that our evidence tells us were less read than others survived along with the rest, and new works – more or less Platonic, but not by Plato – went on being added until the first century BC.

That Plato's texts survived so well is a reflection not only of his status, but of the nature of the corpus itself. Firstly, its parts seem to have been designed to be circulated, some widely, some perhaps less widely. Secondly, whatever it is that Plato stands for, it is not easily to be got from any single dialogue or set of dialogues (indeed, because of the kind of writing these represent, it is not easily to be got at all: see below). No two dialogues cover exactly the same ground, and as Diagram A will confirm (pp. 99–102 above), not many either significantly overlap or even refer to each other. In this sense knowing Plato means reading him all. Every dialogue tends to be surprisingly different from every other, except in the sense that each puts the same heavy demands on readers. To put it another way, it is hard to know what to *discard*; and presumably all the harder if you are inclined, as many readers of Plato have been, to suppose that the corpus as a whole contains a systematic world view.

Such a reading is encouraged by both the range and the nature of Plato's coverage. His topics, or those of his characters, stretch from



the macrocosm, the cosmos itself, down to the microcosm of the individual human soul; and any index to the Platonic corpus will include substantial reference to any serious subject that would have been familiar to an educated ancient audience, as well as many that would not. At the same time the treatment of each of those subjects will tend to be connected, somehow, to that of others. When the eponymous main speaker of the *Timaeus* claims that the world is as 'good' as it can be, what he means is essentially that its parts compose an ordered system, and this pair of associations, of things in the world with 'goodness' and of 'goodness' with order, is fundamental to the Platonic project as a whole. What that project seems to promise above all is a *synoptic* account of everything – something far more ambitious even than any search, in modern science, for a unified field theory, insofar as the aim was to explain individual and society in the same breath as the cosmos itself, and using the same or similar principles.

At the same time the parts of the Platonic corpus themselves are strikingly *unsystematic*. The extended, continuous account of the physical world in the *Timaeus* is practically unparalleled; for the rest, readers must put things together for themselves from conversations or snatches of conversation here and there. Thus if the corpus *does* contain a worked-out system, it has an odd way of showing it. Indeed main speakers, and especially Socrates, typically qualify whatever positive ideas they may advance as provisional and lacking authority. It is an enduring characteristic of Plato's Socrates that he claims to know nothing, and to have got anything substantial from somewhere else; even Timaeus' account is only a 'likely story', or 'likely account' (see below, p. 110), even if we are told to 'look for nothing further' (*Timaeus* 29d). It is perhaps the main challenge for the interpreter of Plato to explain this paradox of a promise of system combined with a form of exposition that seems almost designed to exclude it.

That, however, is a topic for other sections (pp. 116–22 below). For now, it is sufficient to note that there are explanations available, the oldest of which exploits the nature of Socratic teaching as portrayed in the dialogues: a kind of teaching that helps the recipient to find his own way, first or simultaneously purifying him of his mistaken conceptions. So too, the claim is, Plato intends his readers to do the hard work for themselves. This, we may note, will also provide a 'unitarian'-style explanation of the mixture in the corpus of

so-called 'Socratic' dialogues, often apparently negative in outcome, with more positive works like the *Timaeus*. Interpreters who take this sort of line, as most did for two millennia, can then safely get on with looking for Platonic 'doctrines'. (What follows is merely one perspective on such 'doctrines'; there is no implication that this is how the Platonic interpreters in question saw them.)

The world, then, makes sense in terms of system, order, harmony. From here the trail leads in several directions. Firstly there is a strong mathematizing strand in Plato, which expresses itself especially in talk about principles, appropriated from Pythagoreanism: Limit, or the One, and the Unlimited (also, or later, called the 'Indefinite Dyad'), with countable plurality emerging from the 'imposition' of the former upon the latter. This is the kind of talk found in the *Philebus* (16c ff.), and according to Aristotle's and other evidence was much in vogue in the Academy after Plato's death. The *Timaeus* also provides mathematical accounts of the structure of the rational World Soul and of the elements and their relationships (see below, chapter 10, p. 279).

But parallel with this mathematical approach, and perhaps in principle or aspiration ultimately reducible to it, are two others. The Form of the Good, described in the *Republic* as 'beyond being, in authority and in power' (VI, 509b: perhaps because *explaining* the existence of other things?),<sup>2</sup> is compared in the same context to the sun, giving rise to everything intelligible as the sun gives rise to everything that comes-to-be in the physical realm; at the same time it is Forms – once these, or rather 'copies' of them, have been 'received' by the Receptacle, the obscure 'place' that allows them to acquire physical location (*Timaeus* 48e–53c) – that somehow explain the particular phenomenal objects which share their names with them. The emergence of the physical universe can then also be described, again in the *Timaeus*, as a process of the co-operation of reason and necessity, with reason as a divine and provident Craftsman or 'Demiurge' imposing a pattern (the Forms) on recalcitrant materials (27e ff., 47e ff.; cf. chapter 10, p. 279). 'Necessity' is represented both by the fact that the realization of the Creator's intentions frequently requires purely instrumental and in themselves undesirable means, and, secondly, by the inherent instability of the 'Receptacle', which the Creator took over already containing 'traces' of the elements in disordered motion (52d–53b: he imposes the mathematical structures).

If this is still only a 'likely story', what it describes will nevertheless be something *like* the truth, at the level of ultimate reality. Forms in the *Timaeus* are represented centrally by the Form of Living Creature, the model for the cosmos, itself a living creature animated by a rational soul, whose motions are made visible by the heavenly bodies. The Form of Living Creature encapsulates the structured relationships that are assumed to exist between Forms, and are mirrored in the relationships between things in the phenomenal world. Being an image, or a likeness, of this Form, the world is capable of revealing something of the nature of the Form; all the same, a likeness is not the same as its original, and an account based exclusively on a likeness will similarly fall short of one based on the corresponding original (it will be merely 'likely').<sup>3</sup> When Socrates bans observational astronomy from the higher mathematical education of the future philosopher-rulers in the *Republic*, in favour of a study of 'real movements', 'true number' and 'true figures' (VII, 529c–d), he is perhaps relying on the same distinction between embodied structures and relationships and the same structures and relationships considered in isolation from such embodiment, and so in purely mathematical terms. This is the context of Plato's challenge – or of the story of his challenge – to the mathematicians to find a model that would account for the actual movements of the heavens (see chapter 10, p. 291).

The individual, as a compound of body and soul, is an organic part of the physical universe. At the same time the soul, in its best state, will mirror the order of that universe, with the movements of its rational part mimicking the movements of the World Soul. Souls inhabit bodies, but are themselves incorporeal; divine souls move the heavenly bodies. All of this gives a literal sense to the ideal of 'becoming like god' (*homoiōsis theōi*), most eloquently expressed in the *Theaetetus* (176a–177a). Interpreted more generally, 'becoming like god' means becoming as rational as possible, gods being purely rational entities.

The analogy can also go the other way, as it does in the myth – fantasy – of the reversal of the world in the *Statesman* (268d–274e). In the middle of the long series of divisions (on the method see pp. 115–16 below) that will ultimately lead to a definition of the true statesman, the Visitor from Elea embarks on a story which, he admits, is out of proportion to the job it is introduced to do (illustrating

a wrong turning in the divisions). 'You remember those old stories', he says to Socrates' younger namesake, 'about the portent that appeared during the dispute about the kingship between Atreus and Thyestes – the reversal of the movements of the heavenly bodies? Well, the truth about this has never been told . . .' There are, it seems, two recurring eras in world history, one golden, belonging to Cronus, and one belonging to Zeus, in which we ourselves live; and these two eras are separated by a shorter period of reversal,<sup>4</sup> when the deity has 'let go of the steering oars of the universe', at the appointed time. In this period, which begins and ends with great destruction, dead bodies come back to life from the earth, and get smaller as time goes by, until they disappear altogether. What causes the reversal? We are given two explanations: firstly, we are told that the cause is the bodily nature of the whole – nothing bodily can remain in the same condition for ever. This explanation fits well enough with the *Timaeus*. But the second seems rather different. The reversal is now attributed to the 'innate desire' of the physical universe (272e), pent up during the time the guiding deity has been in control; ultimately, however, the universe remembers the teaching of its 'craftsman and father', 'the one who put it together' (273b), and returns to its proper course. This second explanation recalls a common image in Plato, of a divided soul in which the natural rule of the rational part is permanently under threat from the desires of the irrational part or parts.<sup>5</sup> In the *Statesman* myth, the world is not just a living creature, as in the *Timaeus*, but like a human creature, its instability caused not by 'necessity' and the imperfection of a craftsman's materials, but by its own desire, which takes it in the direction opposite to the one favoured by reason. However the metaphor of the *Statesman*, which treats the cosmos as if it were a human agent, is natural enough if we take into account that according to the *Timaeus* the lower parts of the soul are themselves a product of necessity (that is, specifically, a by-product of the insertion of reason into a body), and that irrational desires can be treated – as they are in the *Phaedo* – as the desires of the body.

Society too can be analysed along the same lines. The great thought-experiment of the *Republic*, in which Socrates designs a city or *polis* from the ground up, establishes a direct analogy between city and individual souls (Books II–IV). City and soul each consist of three parts, rational, 'spirited' and appetitive: the city naturally consists of

wise rulers, brave soldiers, effective producers, while internal conflicts in the soul show *it* to contain three separate kinds of desires with separate sorts of objects,<sup>6</sup> the rational kind of desires being naturally dominant over the other two.<sup>7</sup> Allow either of the two lower parts – but especially the appetitive – to get out of hand and usurp the ruling function of reason, and the result will be a diseased city<sup>8</sup> and a diseased individual. Since many individuals' own reason is too weak to exercise its natural rule, reason's rule must be established over them from outside; and that will mean *philosophical* rule, exercised by those who have successfully emerged from the cave in which the rest of humanity finds itself, into the light of truth, and of the Good.<sup>9</sup>

The universe, then, of which we are parts, is structured; it is as the Socrates of the *Phaedo* hoped to find it, 'bound together by the good' (99c–d). And the good that binds the whole is the same good that we all seek in our lives, insofar as we are rational. Nor is this a mere question of coincidence of structures. A series of arguments in different dialogues attempt to show that our souls will survive our deaths, and indeed will last for ever, passing on from one incarnation to another (for the Pythagorean origins of this doctrine, cf. p. 51 above). Insofar as 'we' are identical with our souls, we are no mere ephemeral creatures, but permanent parts of the universe. What is more, when freed from the body the soul can either take flight through the heavens or plumb the depths of the earth, depending on the quality of its conduct in its previous incarnations. The eschatological myths in *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus* depict a cosmos which might have been designed to provide for the appropriate reward and punishment of human beings. They are, of course, *myths*, and we should expect myths not to tell us literal truths (the *Statesman* myth is a case in point). Moreover, they differ in tone, in register, and in the degree to which they borrow motifs from traditional myths. All the same, as Socrates suggests in the context of the *Phaedo* myth, the truth will be that or something *like* that,<sup>10</sup> and indeed in the Platonic universe there is nowhere much else for discarnate souls to go except up or down.<sup>11</sup> What such stories suggest, without their having to establish it, is the idea of a universe whose structure somehow exhibits the goodness, justice and beauty that – as Plato's Socrates urges – should be exhibited in human lives; and exhibits them even (perhaps) to the extent of providing, through its geography or in other ways, those rewards and punishments

that human institutions may fail to provide for lives well or badly lived.

Thus even if man is not the highest thing in the world, nevertheless on Plato's account he has a central role in it. Thanks to his dual nature, he can become like god, remain merely human, or even become an animal. What makes the difference between a first-grade life and a less successful one is *philosophy*, which is both what enables one to see what a good life actually is, and the main constituent of such a life. (The irrational parts will function meanwhile, but tamed in the way that the state education system of the 'beautiful city' of the *Republic* is envisaged as taming its citizens; similarly in the Magnesia of the *Laws*.) *Philosophy* makes the difference, for even granted everything that is claimed by Socrates and others about the way things are in the universe, that will provide no more than a rough framework for deciding how exactly we are to live our lives from day to day. Being told that one should live a good/structured/harmonious/rational life, in imitation of god/nature, is all well and fine; but what exactly is to count as that kind of life, and how do I ensure that the particular decisions I take from day to day will contribute to it? No wonder Socrates goes on refusing to claim any knowledge, and insisting on the need for further thought. No wonder, either, that the importance of philosophy is *the* central theme of the Platonic corpus as a whole. We may identify as many other 'doctrines' in Plato as we like, but to miss this one is to miss the main point.

#### PHILOSOPHY AND TRUTH

Discovering the good will require systematic rational inquiry, and this is what the dialogues above all illustrate and promote. Such inquiry is nearly always in Plato treated as involving face-to-face discussion – conversation – with others; indeed expertise in rational inquiry is just the 'art of conversation', or 'dialectic' (*dialektikē technē*), and even internal thought takes the form of posing and answering questions (see chapter 1, p. 27). What the philosopher wants is to know the truth; since he doesn't have it, he must go looking for it; and where better than in other people? But he can't assume they have it either. He will test and challenge them as closely as he tests and challenges himself, and will allow them to do the same to him.<sup>12</sup>

Given this emphasis on the importance of talking to others, there might be a temptation to attribute some kind of intersubjective notion of truth to Plato; and all the more so in that he seems to reserve real wisdom for gods alone. If a 'god's-eye view' is forever beyond us, then perhaps we shall have to settle for what we, as sharing at least in a part of the gods' rationality, may agree (rationally) with each other to be the case. Yet in the end this looks an unlikely diagnosis of Plato's position, given his evident commitment to Forms as the ultimate objects of knowledge: the Good Itself, Beauty Itself, the Just Itself, and so on. Plato is a 'platonist', who believes in objective truths.

How then do we acquire access to these, if at all? It cannot be just by talking to people, because others, like the sophist brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus whom Socrates encounters in the *Euthydemus*, also spend their time in conversation. What matters is the *kind* of conversation one has. The brothers are mere experts in the 'eristic' branch of sophistry, the art of verbal dispute, and the *Euthydemus* shows at some length what the difference is between this and real dialectic: most importantly, the real dialectician, the philosopher, will be interested in making distinctions where the 'eristic' deliberately avoids making them – even if he understands them – because all he wants is to *win* the debate.

In short, the philosopher argues *philosophically*, that is, with the aim of finding the truth (the *philosophos* is, literally, the 'lover of truth'), whereas the eristic argues to win. What Plato's Socrates is after is arguments that would convince any rational person, just by virtue of that person's being rational. Given that there are only people to try arguments out on, and that human capacities are limited, no agreement between particular individuals that a point has been won can be counted as final. Nor does the fact that a conclusion has not so far been refuted mean that it will not be refuted in the future. Socrates' habit of 'examining myself and others' (*Apology* 38a) is often treated by moderns as if it were a kind of therapy; but purification from false belief is only a condition, and side-product, of the search for truth. The question Socrates puts to himself and others is 'Do we have *reason* for believing that?' And there can be no better standard than what reason has *so far* demonstrated (*Crito*, e.g. 46b), the strongest conclusions *so far* reached (*Phaedo* 100a). It is consistent with this that about the only figures recognized unqualifiedly as



philosophers in Plato apart from Socrates are Parmenides and a visitor from Parmenides' home city of Elea (modern Velia). Parmenides stands out for the austere rigour of his argument, even though Plato thought his conclusions wrong, and spent a significant chunk of the *Sophist* letting the visitor from Elea show why (namely that a proper handling of being and *difference* will offer a way in which 'what is not' can be – something that Parmenides had denied).<sup>13</sup> In the dialogue named after him, Parmenides becomes the critic of Socrates' handling of Forms, while admitting that they are a necessary condition of thinking and speaking. The second and larger part of the dialogue consists in what is announced as a training exercise (135d–136a) in deduction, starting from certain hypotheses ('if (the) one is...'; 'if (the) one is not...'); only Parmenides could give Socrates such lessons in argument. Protagoras is treated with some respect, especially in the *Theaetetus*, but practically every other available figure with any intellectual pretensions tends to be dispatched – along with, and because of, their methods and/or aims – with the full force of Socratic irony. The second part of the *Phaedrus* introduces a theory of philosophically based rhetoric that will allow the truly expert speaker to cater for different kinds of audiences (as Plato does, implicitly, himself?); story-telling, not teaching, is said in the *Statesman* to be appropriate for the masses (304c–d); and the *Laws* advocates that the laws themselves be accompanied by persuasive preludes, the given examples of which surely fall short of the kind of hard argument associated with the philosophical enterprise in other dialogues. But otherwise that hard argument is treated as *the* requirement, however elusive really definitive arguments may seem to be.<sup>14</sup>

If the philosopher/dialectician will evidently always employ question-and-answer, question-and-answer can employ different types of systematic method: one or more kinds of hypothetical method (*Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*), and the method of 'collection and division' that *Phaedrus* and – more allusively – *Philebus* describe and *Sophist* and *Statesman* employ. The latter method is one of definition: 'collection' is a matter of trying to identify the most general item under which the definiendum falls, while division breaks down that item in successive stages until the definiendum is reached, the definition consisting of whatever it is in each division that is kept for further division. But of course 'below' the definiendum, which

will itself be a general item, will be the indeterminate plurality of particular instances of it. The method clearly presupposes a stable and structured reality, to provide the material for division; there is layer upon connected layer stretching down from the highest unity to (what we might call) the *infima species*, which – as Socrates puts it in the *Philebus* – it is our task as philosophers to uncover before ‘abandoning unity to infinity’ (16e), i.e. the phenomenal world that results from the imposition of limit or unity, in its various forms, on the unlimited.

But dialectic is still a matter of *talk*, of using language, and neither language nor the mind that uses it obviously possess any natural or necessary connection with the things to which they purport to refer. This problem Plato had inherited.<sup>15</sup> One solution, appearing in *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*, is that our souls have ‘seen’ the objects of knowledge before being born into bodies but forgotten them at birth, so that ‘learning’ about them is really a matter of recollection (*anamnēsis*): a kind of theory of innate ideas. The proposal immediately defuses any problem of separation between language and Forms, or between human souls/minds and Forms. If such a theory is hardly visible outside *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*, that may be because Plato elsewhere does not have in mind the kind of radical separation between Forms and particulars which the theory was designed to overcome – and which Parmenides criticizes in the *Parmenides*. Here is one case, at least, where there may be an advantage in not attributing ‘doctrines’ to Plato. Philosophers more than anyone should surely be allowed not only to change their minds, but to entertain doubts, as Plato’s own philosopher – Socrates – always does.

#### READING PLATO

None of the above, however, gives much of an idea of what it is actually like to *read* Plato. An external description of a Platonic dialogue must be as far from the real thing as, say, a prose paraphrase of a poem. Among the things inevitably missed is the *indirectness* of Plato’s technique. If the author never appears (he is twice referred to, fleetingly), by and large it is not difficult to locate the authorial voice, usually behind the main speaker. But this does not mean that one can read through the text to the authorial *mind*. The strategies of the character Socrates are often less than straightforward; at least

in the shorter dialogues they are typically responses to particular interlocutors in particular contexts, and reading off more general outcomes can be a ticklish matter. The longer dialogues can appear more transparent, and perhaps they are, but then their sheer variety, combined with the fact that most are formally independent of each other, makes life hardly any easier for the interpreter. And then, on top of this, there is the way in which they tend to mimic – or pretend to mimic – the unpredictability of ordinary conversations. All of this illustrates the point made earlier about the unsystematic nature of the corpus, its essential *messiness*. That does not necessarily mean that the thought behind it is messy (though it might be), but it is as well to be aware of the appearance of the original material.

Consider now, by way of example, three shorter dialogues and two longer:

(a) *Euthyphro*. Euthyphro and Socrates are both involved with the Athenian legal authorities: Euthyphro is prosecuting his own father for homicide, while Socrates will soon be in court on trial for his life. Euthyphro is something of a religious expert, just the sort of person to discuss the nature of *hosiotēs* (piety/propriety?) with Socrates. Asked what *hosiotēs* is, a typical form of question in the shorter dialogues (though also asked in longer ones, such as *Theaetetus*), he begins with the proposal that it's what he's doing now, prosecuting his father. When this fails, he comes up with other proposals, mostly prompted by Socrates, but none stands up to scrutiny, and at the end the conversation comes full circle; Socrates suggests they need to start all over again, but Euthyphro has urgent business elsewhere. In fact, several philosophical points have been made along the way, and near the end Socrates suggests, without explaining, that Euthyphro was *almost* there. Questions: (1) Does he mean it? (2) If he does, which bit was almost right? And (3) why does Plato allow the conversation to stop there?

(b) *Crito*. Socrates is in prison awaiting execution, and his close associate Crito comes to urge him to escape. Socrates instead takes the opportunity to do some philosophy: are Crito's reasons for his escaping any good, and do they trump the rational conclusions they'd reached in previous discussions? It's never good to harm anyone, even in return for harm, and breaking agreements with people does harm to them; his escaping when condemned by due process would break an agreement with, and harm, the laws (he imagines them addressing him); so it won't be a good thing for him to escape, even if

he was condemned unjustly. And the reader knows that he is in fact executed. Modern liberal-minded readers, wanting to take Socrates as a model, often find themselves embarrassed by what appears to be an implied blanket argument against resistance to the state even when the state is wrong. The laws' arguments do not obviously look strong, yet Socrates' says that they are 'buzzing in his ears', and preventing him from hearing anything else. So did he die unnecessarily? Or is Plato's own real point a different one?

(c) *Lysis*. Socrates finds himself in a new gymnasium, where he meets Hippothales, lover of the boy Lysis, then Lysis and Lysis' friend Menexenus. Socrates starts by teaching Hippothales a lesson about how to talk to a beloved, i.e. by humbling him. Socrates, Lysis and Menexenus then discuss what it is that loves and what is loved. What we love is evidently that for which we say we love other things, the 'first friend', something good not loved for the sake of something else; what loves is the neither good (knowledgeable) nor bad (wholly ignorant). The final conclusion of the main argument is that the true lover, sc. the one who truly loves what he says he loves, must necessarily be loved by the beloved (222a) – and after all, who would not love someone who loves them and knows what is truly lovable? (Hippothales, understanding nothing, is delighted.) But now the participants reach an impasse, apparently because the two boys ultimately cannot accept the paradoxical results of the argument. Readers, too, are faced with the choice: accept the argument, or go with the boys and say what's *wrong* with the argument.

(d) *Phaedrus*. Socrates meets Phaedrus, in an idyllic setting outside the city-walls; Phaedrus, a devotee of the orator Lysias, has a speech of Lysias' tucked under his clothes. After reading the speech, on 'Why a beloved should give in to someone who doesn't love him rather than someone who does', Socrates responds with two speeches of his own, one for the thesis and one – an inspired speech – against it. The second speech first argues for the soul's immortality, and then in mythical mode compares the tripartite soul to a charioteer and his pair of horses, white and black, promising at least temporary escape from incarnation for the true lover, the soul that has lived three successive philosophical lives with no concessions to the black horse of appetite. Such a soul will soar through the heavens with the gods, and will hope to get another sight of the Forms, beyond the heavens, at the ten-thousand-yearly feast the gods enjoy.

After this speech, Socrates discusses with Phaedrus what makes for good and bad writing and speaking, developing a theory of philosophical rhetoric, and finally devaluing writing by comparison with living dialectic and its capacity to collect and divide: the expert dialectician is the true sower of immortal seed in others' souls.

(e) *Philebus*. The eponymous Philebus supports pleasure as the candidate for what constitutes the Good in the good life; Socrates supports knowledge. The dialogue begins with these protagonists at loggerheads, and with one Protarchus taking over Philebus' case. The conversation ends, however, with the conclusion that, although knowledge ranks ahead of pleasure, the Good itself is neither of these but the combination of beauty, measure and truth that regulates their mixture. The dialogue mostly consists in a detailed analysis of pleasure and pleasures, preceded by a – dialogical – excursus on method and its metaphysical presuppositions: the passage on Limit and the Unlimited (see above, pp. 109, 115–16), which also have a product and a cause. The excursus seems to go considerably beyond what is required for the discussion that follows, and in many respects is more suggestive than explicit. Is this because Plato has more up his sleeve than he is telling us, or because he hasn't?

#### ALTERNATIVE READINGS

The lack of determinacy in the Platonic texts, and their variety and complexity, have unsurprisingly spawned numerous interpretative strategies. Of these, the oldest and most general may be labelled respectively the 'dogmatic' (or 'doctrinal') and the 'sceptical' tendencies. Plato's immediate successors in the Academy continued with the kind of ambitious metaphysical schemes hinted at in the *Philebus*; but not so long afterwards the 'New' Academy (see chapter 6) was treating Plato as a sceptic – an approach which, like its opposite, can easily be justified by privileging some parts of the corpus and downplaying others. 'Dogmatic' types of interpretation then regained the ascendancy, giving rise to what we label as the 'Middle Platonists' and the Neoplatonists, whose idea of Platonism remained the one most widely accepted until the modern period.

Both 'dogmatic' and 'sceptical' modes of interpretation have their modern analogues: the former, for example, in the 'esoteric' reading of Plato, or in the Straussian, the latter in what may broadly be

termed the 'analytical' reading, which probably still dominates in the English-speaking world. 'Esoteric' interpreters find the core of Plato in his oral teaching, what Aristotle calls, and documents as, the 'unwritten doctrines'; the dialogues are more or less explicit invitations to the dance. For the 'Straussians' (followers of the Platonic scholar and political philosopher Leo Strauss), Plato's indirectness is concealment: the real, subversive meaning of the philosopher – who must always stand in fear of suffering the fate of a Socrates – needs to be looked for, by the trained reader, under the surface.

A caricature of an 'analytical' interpreter would identify him as one who formalizes whatever can be formalized and discards the rest; or who sees no difference between a dialogical argument and its monological counterpart. The extreme form of self-consciously 'literary' interpretations will, by contrast, tend to treat the arguments of the dialogues as secondary.

It is the analytical interpreters who have probably most enthusiastically embraced the 'developmental' model referred to at pp. 104–6 above, partly because of a fundamental commitment to the idea of progress in philosophy: development in this case implies improvement, and correction of mistakes, perhaps even the abandonment of metaphysics; and in any case for the analytical Plato it is finally *argument* that matters, not grand conclusions.

Esoterists, Straussians and others are essentially 'unitarian' in tendency – as, again, all the ancients were. That in itself may seem an impressive fact, though of course the ancients in question were committed Platonists, with their own axes to grind, in a way that most modern readers have not been. (Nor had ancient interpreters invented stylometry, for what that is worth.)

There is, however, what looks like a major obstacle to any unitarian interpretation: the presence, and active deployment, in a number of dialogues of a philosophical theory that is inconsistent with a significant proportion of the ideas described as 'Platonic' at pp. 109–13 above. In this group of works – which happens more or less to coincide with Group 1 in Diagram C (p. 104) – the starting-point, or the end-point, is a view of human motivation which either explicitly or implicitly denies that we can be 'overcome by (irrational) desire'; we cannot 'willingly go wrong'.<sup>16</sup> So most directly in the *Protagoras* (351b ff.), but also in the *Lysis*, which argues that even the most basic, physiological desires are directed to what is truly

good for us; also in the *Symposium*, where Diotima the priestess and Socrates' teacher sponsors a similar argument, and in the 'dialogues of definition', which tend consistently to assimilate the 'virtues' (excellences) to knowledge (the *Charmides* treats even *sōphrosynē* like this, an excellence typically understood, and treated in *Republic* IV, as 'self-control' – a notion for which there will in fact be no room, if there is none for 'weakness of will'). On this theory, what motivates every action we perform, except under external compulsion, is our desire for what is, overall, good for us; and the only relevant difference between us as individuals is what we happen to believe will contribute to that good. (We shall also probably be attracted by other things, but will not go for them unless we think that best. The quality of our actions, then, is determined by the quality of our beliefs; hence the name given to the theory, 'intellectualism'.)

To be human, in this case, will be simply to be rational: there is no beast in us, to be whipped, cajoled or conditioned into quietness, and the only way of changing people's behaviour will be to talk to them, to give them *reasons* for changing. This is the position against which Plato's Socrates appears to be arguing in Book IV of the *Republic*, when he introduces the tripartite soul, one third rational and two thirds irrational;<sup>17</sup> for he specifically argues both that the desires of the irrational 'parts' have their own, non-rational, objects, and that they are capable of overcoming our rational, good-directed desires. (So now there *will* be a need for irrational modes of control. The political dimension in Plato, and indeed many other aspects of his thinking, seem vitally dependent on the argument of *Republic* IV. The intellectualist Socrates is no political theorist; nor, as it happens, does he have much interest in science, or in the idea of an immortal soul.)

Aristotle is familiar with this kind of theory, which he consistently attributes to the real Socrates. But, like many moderns, he does not think much of it, discovering the real difference between Socrates and Plato in the latter's 'separation' of Forms (see pp. 104–5, 109–10 above). Here too Aristotle's judgement has been influential, for the distinction between 'early' and 'middle' in Diagram B (p. 103 above) is essentially based on this point of his (i.e. about 'separation'). Socratic intellectualism, for its part, is nowadays frequently held to be easily falsifiable and therefore uninteresting. Yet *Plato* evidently did not easily dismiss the Socratic theory – partly,



perhaps, because he understood it better. Aristotle complains, among other things (and moderns have again taken up the refrain), that it leaves out the factor of motivation and/or emotion, which – as Plato works it out – it plainly does not: what drives us, on the theory in question, is precisely desire for the good. It may even be that Plato thought he was improving on Socrates in *Republic* IV, not abandoning him, insofar as his substantive views on the nature of the good life remained unaltered. Again, even if he thought – or came to think – that not all desires were for the good, he nevertheless still thought that every *soul*, every person, desires the good, *qua* rational (the idea of desire for the merely apparent good is an Aristotelian invention). But the consequences of the shift in other respects are considerable – and much greater than those of metaphysical ‘separation’ (from *Aristotle’s* point of view, ‘separated’ Forms represent a massive philosophical mistake, but there seem to be few implications for ethics).

If Plato thought there was continuity even here between himself and Socrates, then perhaps honours will yet be even between developmentalists and unitarians. However the more important point, in the present context, is that Plato himself seems finally to have decided against the ‘intellectualist’ view. It is of course conceivable that he *started* with the anti-intellectualist, irrationalist, model of the human mind, and later moved into what Aristotle firmly identifies as the Socratic camp; but if stylometry shows anything, it seems consistently to show that Plato’s interest in the intellectualist position came earlier rather than later. And it is the general theme of a conflict between reason and unreason that dominates works like *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Statesman*, *Timaeus–Critias* and *Laws* – and through them, the corpus as a whole. This, together with the belief in philosophy and the difference it makes to life (because contributing to the victory of reason over unreason, of order over disorder) has every claim to be called properly ‘Platonic’.

## NOTES

- 1 The *Seventh Letter*, even if not genuine, will probably add to this scant list of biographical items three visits to Syracuse in Sicily and some sort of political involvement there. The author of the letter echoes Socrates’ famous declaration in the *Republic* that ‘until philosophers rule as kings or those presently called kings...philosophize...cities will have no

respite from evils' (473c–d), and has Plato unsuccessfully attempting to turn the young Syracusan tyrant Dionysius II into a philosopher (cf. pp. 107–13 below, and *Republic* VI, especially 502a–b). Maybe it was on his Italian travels that Plato encountered Pythagoreanism (though there were also Pythagoreans visiting and resident in mainland Greece) For other more certainly fictional travels attributed to Plato, see chapter 9, pp. 251–2.

- 2 Cf. Hankinson, p. 282 this volume, for a contrast of such teleological explanation with mere 'mechanistic causes'. These latter, on the Platonic account, will belong to the sphere of 'necessity', on which see p. 109.
- 3 To the extent that the existence of the Demiurge is inferred from the 'goodness' of the phenomenal world, it too will be subject to the same caveat, i.e. 'likely' but not certain; and in fact the gods are one of only two examples Timaeus uses in spelling out his point about the mere 'likeness' of the following account ('so in many cases about many things, about gods and the coming-into-being of the all': 29c). So the evidence is that there was a creation, and a Creator, but the evidence is not *that* good.
- 4 A more usual interpretation of the myth has just two stages in each cycle, with the world – puzzlingly – in reverse for the whole of the (ideal?) age of Cronus.
- 5 'Irrationality' here is defined by opposition to the dictates of reason. Reason is naturally directed towards the good; 'appetitive' desires are for food, drink, sex, and so on, without reference to whether these objects are good or not. See further below, and p. 121.
- 6 The second, 'spirited', part, though the natural ally of reason, is also irrational and also has projects of its own: the maintenance of self-esteem, winning, and so on.
- 7 The extended argument to this effect in Book IV of the *Republic* has a good claim to being one of the most important in Plato. See pp. 120–2 below, and p. 25 above, where part of the argument is cited.
- 8 A 'healthy' city will be a wise one, ruled by wisdom and reason in its rulers; it will in fact be one where all three constituent groups, rulers, soldiers and producers, do 'what belongs to them' – and so will also be 'just', 'justice' being defined as 'doing one's own'. Courage it will have from its properly trained – and obedient – soldiers, and 'self-control' from the agreement of all three groups about who should rule. All the 'political' virtues thus relate essentially to the single factor of the rule of wisdom.
- 9 The 'Cave' reference is to the great simile (514a–518d) that rounds off the group of three in *Republic* VI–VII. If the gap between rulers and ruled is much narrower in Plato's other imaginary city, in the *Laws*,

- this evidently has as much to do with the exclusion of ordinary people from the citizen-body as with any relaxation in the requirements for rulership (as laid out in their most extreme form in the *Statesman*).
- 10 *Phaedo* 114d. This is rather different from the 'likelihood' of the *Timaeus*' cosmology: there the account was (only) 'likely' because of problems with the evidence, whereas here the problem is that there is no evidence at all – which is one reason for moving into 'mythical' mode.
- 11 The universe for Plato is a sphere of limited size (its boundary being marked by the fixed stars), and there is no other dimension for things to enter; souls must evidently always be located somewhere within the universe itself. From this point of view, once given that souls are immortal, the Pythagorean theory of their 'transmigration' from body to body looks economical enough.
- 12 'Testing', 'examining', and 'refuting' all fall within the scope of the central Greek root in this area: *elench-*, as in the verb *elenchein*, and the noun *elenchos*.
- 13 Being and difference, along with sameness, motion and rest, constitute the five 'greatest kinds' (*megista genē*) on whose complex interrelation the *Sophist* relies for its solution to the problem of how false statement is possible.
- 14 The *Phaedo* neatly illustrates the essential points: four arguments (roughly) for immortality, each successive argument designed to improve on its predecessor(s), and a final one that – Socrates promises (107b) – will deliver the goods, with some further work.
- 15 See especially *Cratylus*. Contrast also the frequent talk of 'seeing' the objects of knowledge in Books VI–VII of the *Republic* with the subsequent description in Book VII of what dialectic can actually achieve: a grasp that consists of statements not so far refuted (534b–c).
- 16 See chapter 3, p. 94 above. How much of the working-out of the theory we find in Plato had already been done by Socrates is impossible to tell; if it was mostly done by Plato, still it is evidently what the original Socratic position required, and so may to that extent count as genuinely Socratic.
- 17 Tripartition in Plato sometimes gives way to bipartition, as e.g. in the *Laws*, where he shows less interest in treating the aggressive/competitive as a distinct aspect of humanity's irrational side.