

The Contamination of the Soul: Plato on Evil

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Abstract: In this essay I want to explore the concept of evil in the sense of badness within Plato. I suggest that Plato had a theory of evil, and I will articulate and discuss its main features. Plato can be shown to have had a theory of evil in the sense that he had a coherent view about the nature of evil, how it is possible for things to be evil, and how these ideas fit together to explain the nature of more specific forms of evil such as, say, vice. I argue that Plato's theory of evil is a very early version of the so-called privation theory of evil, according to which evil is the absence in a thing of what ought to be there given the essence it has as the kind of thing it is. The discussion will focus upon Plato's doctrine of due measure as found in, among other places, *Statesman*, *Timaeus*, and *Philebus*.

For my mother and father

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Introduction

§1. Two Conceptions of Evil

Consider the following vignette:

It is the dead of winter. A hawk sits atop a tall spruce tree and scans for prey in the surrounding below its perch. A small, hungry squirrel attempts to locate a cache of food hidden here some months before. The squirrel wanders out from beneath the cover of the thick trees. The hawk immediately catches sight of it. The hawk takes flight. It makes a quick dive for the squirrel. Suddenly the squirrel becomes aware of the hawk, but, paralysed by fear, it stands motionless. Just moments before the hawk snatches it up the squirrel attempts to flee. Too late. The hawk gets its dinner.

Suppose we were set the task of giving a full description of the normative facts which exist in this vignette. What might we say? Well, we could begin by focussing on the ‘positive’ evaluative facts, that is, the good things involved. Thus we might say that the hawk has good eyesight to be

able to spot a small squirrel' movement from on high in the darkness. The squirrel also has a good sense of smell, or memory, or whatever it is which allows squirrels to re-locate long-ago hidden food. We could go on in this way, enumerating the various positive normative facts. Eventually, we would move on to identifying the 'negative' normative facts. Thus we might say that the pain involved in its death has a negative evaluative status, that its excessive fear-response is a defect, or that its attempt to escape is a failure. Given the presence of these 'negatives', would it be correct, that is, would it be *true*, to say that this vignette exemplifies various forms of evil? Is it true that, for example, that the pain, defect, and failure of the squirrel are *evil*?

I presume that many of us share the now-common intuition about the meaning of the term 'evil' which makes it seem obvious that the answer to this question is most assuredly, No. Indeed, so obvious is this apparent falsity that even to ask the question suggests having made some category mistake in regard to the meaning of 'evil'. For nothing in this vignette seems to be the sort of thing which could even possibly be evil. The intuition guiding this reply embodies a certain popular conception of 'evil' as having a very narrow meaning. Let us say that to understand 'evil' in this narrow way is to understand it as referring to *evil_N*. On this conception, 'evil' refers to a certain property, or conjunction of properties, namely, *being evil_N* in virtue of the instantiation of which a thing comes to have so negative a normative status as to deserve of the strongest forms of moral opprobrium and condemnation.¹

The narrowness of this conception consists in the idea that the domain of kinds of thing which can possibly instantiate the property *being evil_N* is supposed to be rather limited. In particular, it is thought that *being evil_N* can be instantiated only, or primarily (in a sense discussed

¹ There is no shortage of examples of *evil_N* deeds. Indeed the authors and creators of 'true crime' media essentially make it their business to uncover such examples and it is evident that business is booming. If it would be helpful to have before one's mind some paradigmatic instances of *evil_N*, one need only search for information on the Canadian case of R. v. Bernardo (20 June 1995).

below), by *actions* for which some moral agent, or group of moral agents, bears responsibility. That is, the property of which ‘evil’ is the name, the property *being evil_N*, is, according to this narrow conception, exclusively, or primarily, a property which nothing which is not an action for which some moral agent(s) bears responsibility, or which is not suitably related to such an action, can rightly be said to have. Thus, we can explain why it seems to be a category mistake to predicate ‘is evil’ of anything involved in the vignette of the squirrel and the hawk: nothing in that vignette can rightly be said to be an action for which some moral agent bears responsibility or can rightly be said to be related suitably to such an action in any way.

Many, if not most, contemporary philosophers who engage with the topic of evil do so within the context of this narrow conception. The prevalence of this focus supports and is supported by the prevalence of the narrow conception which evidently predominates as the default understanding of ‘evil’. Yet despite the prevalence of the narrow conception, there is another, older conception of the meaning ‘evil’ according to which the answer to the above question about the case of the hawk and the squirrel is, Yes. Indeed, on the basis of this other conception, this affirmative answer is just as obviously correct as was the negative answer in terms of *evil_N*. Let us say that to have this other conception is to conceive of ‘evil’ as meaning *evil_B*.²

Understood as referring to *evil_B*, ‘evil’ is taken to be a synonym for ‘badness’ and thus to be a generic term for any and all ‘negative’ things insofar as they are ‘negative’. Thus, on the plausible assumption that such things as, say, failure, defect, suffering, irrationality, immorality, etc. are all bad, each of these things is rightly said to be *evil_B*. It becomes clear why, on this conception, a positive answer to the question about the hawk and squirrel is obvious and perhaps even trivially true. For to ask whether things which have ‘negative’ normative value are *evil_B*

² See Calder, 2013 for more on the division between the broad and narrow conceptions.

amounts to asking whether bad things are bad. We have, then, two conceptions of ‘evil’, one narrow, one broad, and, corresponding to each conception, two answers to the question of whether the above vignette can truly be said to involve evil.

Let me pause here to clarify what I mean in saying that *being evil_N* might be thought of as being not exclusively but *primarily* a property of certain types of action. First, what I mean here involves just what was hinted at above, namely, the idea of something’s not being an action for which some moral agent(s) bears responsibility but that thing’s being suitably related to such an action. The particular relationship which one identifies as ‘being suitably related’ will in general vary between various theories of evil_N. The term ‘evil’ is regularly applied not only to actions but also to people, characters or dispositions, institutions, etc. So, for example, one might hold that people are evil insofar as, and only insofar as, they are related to evil_N actions in a particular way, say, by being disposed to causing such actions. In this way, certain types of action are not the *only* things which can properly be said to be evil_N, because people, too, can be evil_N but, crucially, only insofar as they are suitably related to such an action, namely, by being disposed to causing such actions.

Second, while things other than evil_N actions can be evil_N only if they are suitably related to evil_N actions, whether an evil_N action is evil_N *does not* depend on that action’s being related to something else which is evil_N. Thus, by saying that ‘evil’ names a property which is ‘primarily’ a property of actions I mean to indicate the following: 1) ‘evil’ is properly said of certain types of action—namely, those with the necessary and sufficient conditions to have the property *being evil_N*, which includes the necessary condition that there be some moral agent who bears responsibility for that action’s taking place—and 2) it is neither necessary nor sufficient for the instantiation by an action of the property *being evil_N* that the action be related to something else

which instantiates that same property; 3) things other than actions can properly be called ‘evil’; and 4) things other than actions are properly called ‘evil’ only if those things are related in the right way to evil_N actions. When ‘evil’ is used of things other than evil_N actions, it is used derivatively, and when it is used of evil_N actions it is used non-derivatively, that is, in its primary sense.

In this essay I want to explore the older, now out of fashion view that, conception of evil as evil_B. That is, I want to focus not upon evil as a property only of actions, not upon evil_N, but upon evil in the broad sense of evil_B. Moreover, I shall explore this concept as it is found in the philosophy of Plato. I suggest that Plato had a theory of evil, and will articulate and discuss its main features. These are, roughly speaking, the character of evil, how it is possible for things to be evil, and how these ideas fit together to explain how the nature of more specific forms of evil.

Some may be somewhat dubious about the claim the Plato had something which is appropriately called a ‘theory’—meaning, *inter alia*, an internally coherent, systematic, explanatory account—of the nature of evil, broad or narrow, rather than merely having expressed, say, a number of loosely connected, occasional, even conflicting thoughts on the topic. Notoriously, for example, Plato appears to offer two conflicting accounts of the origin of evil between *Timaeus* on the one hand and *Laws* on the other. Still, I aim to show that a strong case can be made for the claim that Plato in fact did have a reasonably worked out, substantially consistent, and systematic view of these issues, and thus that he had a theory of evil. As we shall see, Plato’s theory of evil is works in parallel with his thinking about how and why the sensible world exists, how and why, that is, there are things finite beings that are other than the perfectly intelligible Forms and other members of the intelligible realm. For Plato, understanding one involves understanding the other.

Note that all translations, except where explicitly noted, are taken from Cooper's *Plato: Complete Works*, and that both the L.S.J. *A Greek-English Lexicon*, and the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* edited by James Diggle have been used for the meaning and usages of the Greek terms.

CHAPTER ONE

The Essence of Evil

What is the essential character of evil? One way to begin the search for Plato's answer to this question is to take stock of his opinions of the sensible world and the body. In particular, when one compares his view of the pursuit of bodily good such as health or wealth one can perceive a slight tension between Plato's discussions of these, and of body-care and thereby between Plato's opinions on these points of which those discussions seem to be expressions. For, in many places, Plato discusses the body and the bodily as being something to be reviled. But, in many other places, it is evident that Plato sees the body and the bodily as something capable of manifesting so much goodness and beauty as to constitute a proof for the existence of God. So, on the one hand Plato sees the bodily as a sort of murky mire in which soul trapped, but on the other, as something of a monument to the goodness of the divine. Trying to understand how Plato coherently maintains both of these opinions allows us to see what he thinks is the nature of evil *per se*.

§1. *Mire and Monument: Plato's Attitudes toward the Body*

Perhaps one of the strongest impressions one can take away the dialogues is the pessimistic or downright contemptuous attitude which Plato often adopts towards the human body specifically and the bodily order of reality, that is, the sensible as opposed to intelligible realm, in general. For example, in *Phaedo* and in *Cratylus* the body is likened to a prison; so, too, the allegory of the cave in *Republic* begins with the idea that we are like prisoners and the sensible world is like an underground prison; in *Phaedrus* the body is compared to a grave; the myth of the cosmic epochs in *Statesman* has it that the bodily of the cosmos is responsible for its corruption in the absence of God; in *Symposium* the Form of Beauty is said never to be 'infected (ἀνάπλεων)' by the characteristics of body; in *Gorgias* Socrates compares the mortal world to the Underworld, life in the body to death in the soul.³

Yet at many other places throughout the dialogues, Plato seems to take the opposite view. The best example of this is that Plato bases a proof for the existence of a beneficent, rational, divine creator on the observation that this world is beautiful, orderly and, thus, good. Indeed, the first two 'rungs' of the so-called *scala amoris* involves the recognition of the beauty in a body. Though it is certainly true that the beauty in these things depends upon their bearing certain important relationships to true seat of beauty in intelligible world, but it is nevertheless true that these things manifest, in their own ways, beauty and goodness.

In order to understand why the tension involved in simultaneously disparaging and praising the body, to exhume the unified view beneath this *merely* apparent tension, is to understand those principles maintained by Plato from which his view of the nature of evil can be derived. For though it is true that Plato consistently maintains that care for the soul and the pursuit of its goods—e.g.,

³ *Phaedo* 62b et passim; *Cratylus* 4001c-d1; *Republic* 514ff; *Phaedrus* 250c5-6; *Statesman* 273b4f; *Symposium* 211e3; *Gorgias* 493a1-3.

virtue—must take precedence over body-care and the pursuit of bodily goods—e.g., honour—since it does not follow from *a*'s being more important than *b* that *b* is unimportant, so Plato does not maintain that since care for the body is less important than care for the soul, body-care and bodily goods are worthless or evil.⁴ What is undeniable, however, is that Plato holds a view closely related to the former, namely, that the body, though not necessarily evil in itself, is nevertheless evil's door into the world.

It would be false to say that Plato maintains that the body is necessarily evil, or that caring for the body is necessarily bad. In fact, Plato recognises that not only is it not necessarily evil to take care of the body, to do so is necessary and can even attain genuine *goods* such as health and beauty. But it is absolutely crucial for understanding Plato's view that we grasp his substantive understanding of what constitutes *care* rather than indulgence of the body. For while Plato recognises, as we do, a formal connection between care for *x* and meeting the needs of *x*, that is, that doing the former means doing the latter, where *x* is 'the body' what counts as its 'needs' is for Plato something very different from what many people take it to be. Many of us today, and even people in Plato's own time, embrace so permissive a conception of 'need' as to count even the most incidental bodily cravings as a need, and so to count satisfying of such cravings as caring for the body.⁵

Indeed, for many people the distinction between taking care of the body and merely treating the body in a particular way is taken not to be founded upon objective, universal standards but rather on arbitrary, parochial traditions or else special prudential interests. This is certainly not the case for Plato: his understanding of what the body—or anything else—needs, and, hence, of what

⁴ See *Symposium* 202a1f where Diotima admonishes Socrates for making just this sort of error.

⁵ E.g., *Republic* 372d7-8 where Glaucon complains that Socrates is causing the citizens of the city they are imagining 'to suffer hardships (ταλαιπωρεῖσθαι)' because he has not provided them with conventional desserts and comforts.

counts as caring for it is much more austere. For not only does Plato think there is a real distinction between appropriate/inappropriate treatment of the body, between truly caring for it and neglecting or indulging it, but also his way of drawing this distinction is grounded in objective, universal standards which are baked into the very fabric of our world owing to our world's dependence upon and derivation from the perfect world of the intelligible where the beings which determine these standards reside eternally.

But at so general a level as this characterisation, one might get the mistaken impression that Plato's view is that it is good to care for the body except when it is not, or that the extent to which someone pursues a given bodily good is appropriate unless it is inappropriate. What we need, then, is to compliment the picture of the formal structure of Plato's view with a substantive account of what appropriately caring for the body is. We need to see how Plato answers such questions. What determines a thing as being excessive and therefore bad, or insufficient, and therefore bad, care for the body? More generally, what explains whether and why the pursuit of an apparent good—e.g., the pursuit of food, or drink, or status—is in fact good or is in fact evil? To answer these and related questions we need to see how Plato substantiates his view with an account of what determines the boundaries within which an activity, pursuit, state, etc., is genuinely good and when it is bad. The same account for what makes certain pursuits for bodily goods a good or bad pursuit, and the attainment or failure to attain these good or bad, is the same in form for the pursuit of any kind of good. That is, the way in which the body's good is determined, and thus the way in which particular deeds are determined to be care or mistreatment of the body, is the same way in which the good for anything is determined.

In general, a state, pursuit, action, etc. is good if and only if it leads to, maintains, or flows from, the appropriate condition of a thing. We must understand, then, what it is for a thing to be in

appropriate condition, and, thus, what determines whether a thing counts as leading to, maintaining, or flowing from something in the appropriate condition, and, therefore, whether a state, pursuit, action, etc., is good or bad. Understanding how Plato makes these distinctions, and what he takes their truth to be grounded in, requires understanding Plato's doctrine of due measure.

§2. *Due Measure in Statesman*

In the dialogue *Statesman* we find the Visitor from Elea continuing the task, which Socrates had set him in *Sophist*, of distinguishing from each other the natures of the sophist, statesman, and philosopher. As the name suggests, in *Statesman* the Visitor is hunting down the nature of the statesman. Much of the dialogue is taken up, however, with general methodological considerations and demonstrations of proper dialectical butchery, that is, the proper use of the method of collection and division.

At 283b, having just completed a lengthy process of collection and division to isolate the nature of the art of weaving, the Visitor complains to his interlocutor, Socrates the younger—not *the* Socrates—that their efforts to do so were needlessly protracted. For in the course of trying to reach their target, they penetrated far deeper than was necessary into topics quite besides the point, thereby expending needlessly much energy and time. This occasions a short digression into the logic and metaphysics of what it means, and how it is possible, to judge correctly something as being *excessively* long or *too* short. The answer requires an even more general investigation into the two ways in which it possible to associate 'greatness and smallness' in things, that is, to measure their extents in some or other quality. As it turns out, this is a very abstract definition of measurement, and thus the art concerned with this is 'the art of measurement'.⁶

⁶ *Statesman* 283d2.

According to the Visitor, the art of measurement has two parts, each part corresponding to one of the two ways of measuring things. The first part concerns ‘the association of greatness and smallness with each other’. As an example, consider the following. To say that knife *a* is sharper than knife *b*. To make this judgement is to measure the extent of *a*’s sharpness relative to *b*’s. That is, to say that *a* is sharper than *b* amounts to the same thing as saying that *b* is duller than *a*. On the basis of such measurements it would be possible, say, to create an ordered ranking of *a* and *b* on the basis of sharpness. This form of measurement is a purely inter-relative determination of greatness and smallness—here in degrees of sharpness—and can only determine descriptive, non-normative differences in the extent of things by relating them to each other. Suppose you are buying knife for the purpose of dicing some tomatoes. You consult the list ranking *a* and *b*’s sharpness in relation to each other, and correctly conclude that *a* is sharper than *b*. On the basis of this conclusion, you purchase *a*. When you get home and attempt to use *a* for cutting the tomatoes, you find it makes not even the slightest mark upon the skin of the tomatoes: *a* is extremely dull. It is therefore true that *a* is sharper than *b* and yet *a* is too dull for the chopping of tomatoes.

When the judgement of the extent of *a*’s sharpness was made relative to *b*, it was correctly determined that *a* was sharper than *b*. But the example shows that *a*’s being sharper than what is duller than it says nothing about whether *a* is sharp *enough*. Things brings us to the second part of the art of measurement. For the Visitor tells us that whereas the purely descriptive judgments of the first kind of measurement concerns greatness and smallness in relation only to each other, the second part of the art concerns greatness and smallness in relation to ‘the being necessary for generation (τὴν τῆς γενέσεως ἀναγκαίαν οὐσίαν)’.⁷ Just a little, later however, we told that this part concerns greatness and smallness ‘in relation to what is in due measure (πρὸς τὸ μέτριον)’.⁸

⁷ *Statesmen* 283d7-9.

⁸ *Statesman* 283e11.

So we seem to have two seemingly distinct characterisations of this second art. The natural inference here is that these two characterisations are in fact referring to one and the same thing, or very nearly so: i.e., that i) measurement in relation to the being necessary for generation, and ii) measurement in relation to what is in due measure are one and the same thing, or at least so closely related to each other as to be practically the same.

That they are at least so closely related is corroborated by the fact that, for the rest of the digression, whatever else the Visitor has to say about the second part of the art of measurement he puts in terms not of ‘the being necessary for generation’ but always in terms of ‘what is in due measure’ or of ‘the generation of what is in due measure (τὴν τοῦ μετρίου γένεσιν)’.⁹ That (i) and (ii) are not only very closely related but in reality one is clear from the fact that, were they not, then, with the introduction of (ii), we would seem to have a *third* part of the art of measurement. Yet the Visitor consistently speaks as if there are precisely two parts to this art. Therefore, we should conclude that both (i) and (ii) refer to what the same thing. I suggest, moreover, that the statement of (ii) is meant to be a more perspicuous reformulation of the statement of (i).

Even if (ii) is clearer with respect to the less clear characterisation in (i), it seems still to fall short of what would be appropriate. But this fact exemplifies precisely the difference between the two arts of measurement. For by ‘what is in due measure’ the Visitor means a standard, something that determines a certain extent, degree, amount, etc., of a thing as the extent, degree, amount, etc., which it is right, fitting, appropriate, etc., for that thing to be. So, again, when we determine *a* as being sharper than *b*, we mean only that the degree of sharpness of *a* is greater than the degree of sharpness of *b*. But this gave no guidance as to whether *a* was sharp enough for the purpose of cutting tomatoes, or, as we can now say, the sharpness of *a* was not fitting for the

⁹ *Statesman* 284c2, 284d6

required purpose. But this is true only because we are measuring its sharpness not by a relative comparison of degrees, but by comparison with an independently determined standard, in this case, a certain purpose. The being necessary for generation is itself in due measure and is thereby the standard which determines whether certain things that come to be in the sensible world are themselves in due measure. In words, things in the realm of becoming are in due measure only to the extent that they resemble the relevant being or beings in the intelligible realm as paradigms for what comes to be here. To fit the standard is to be in due measure and to be as like that which is paradigmatically in due measure, intelligible being.

But is it so clear that the ‘being’ which determines what in the sensible world counts as being in due measure, the being which sets the standard on the basis of which normative judgments are made, is necessarily eternal, intelligible being? Is it necessarily only Forms which determine these standards? For in the case of the knife just given, the determination of the extent which is in due measure, which is the standard, was determined solely on the basis of the reason for the sake of which the individual wanted a certain knife. That is, the standard there was determined entirely subjectively—although, whether a thing fit, exceeded, or was exceeded by the standard was not entirely subjective. To take another example, the impetus behind the Visitor’s digression into the art of measurement generally is that their speech was, perhaps, too long, and that, in order to determine whether this is true, they would need to investigate the metaphysics of normative judgment. Does this mean, then, that there is a Form of Speeches which determines whether any given speech is in due measure? Presumably Plato would want to avoid this conclusion, but perhaps not. In any case, it could be avoided by recognising that more than just Forms can provide the standards, so that in special cases something like individual purpose could determine whether, say, a speech was in ‘due measure’ with respect to that purpose.

And what would the relativist say to all of this? Protagoras or his ilk would maintain that ‘Mankind is measure of all things’, that is, that humans create *all* standards against which things are normatively measured. Such a one could maintain, on the one hand, that Plato is quite right to think that normative judgments logically require independent standards—that is, something said to be, for example, not merely *hotter* than what is colder than it, but what is *hot*—but, on the other, that Plato is quite wrong if he thinks standards are not themselves relative to the opinions, attitudes, or whatever, of particular people or groups of people. Such a standard would still be ‘independent’ in the sense that it is not necessarily determined by inter-relative comparisons but is determined non-relatively. The stipulation that, say, anything above 29° C counts as ‘hot’ is determined independently in this sense, even though it is arbitrary. The relativist could thus accept, with Plato, that normative judgments logically require the existence of standards. But the relativist would go on to maintain that all standards just are, or are created by, the beliefs and values of particular persons, or groups of people at a certain time in a certain place such that particular normative judgments can be true or false depending upon the particular standards they are measured against.

Plato is certainly no relativist. It is on this point that the initial characterisation of the second art of due measurement, viz., the art of normative measurement, in terms of the being necessary for generation is crucial for understanding Plato’s view of things. For Plato maintains that some, though, apparently not all,¹⁰ standards are set not by any person, group, culture, etc., but principles in the intelligible world. As we will see, these are the Forms and, ultimately, the Form of the Good.¹¹ These together determined certain *natural* standards which are baked into the very fabric of the world as an image of the intelligible world, standards which are therefore perfectly universal

¹⁰ See *Statesman* 285c-287b where the Visitor explains that, in fact, the lengthy discussion which occasioned the digression was *appropriately* long because it fit the standard determined by the real purpose of that discussion, namely, improvement in the art of dialectic. Thus, here is an example where intention can set the relevant standard.

¹¹ For arguments that this section of the dialogue has the Forms in mind see Cherniss 1936. Also Mohr 1977.

and objective such that anyone within the world of which these real standards are a part are thus subject to one and the same set of such standards. Since Plato thinks there is but one world, these standards are the same standards for everyone, although, this is not to say that in between any two contexts one and the same standard is applied or manifested in the same way. Justice is perhaps manifested when returning to a friend a sword borrowed from him, but it is certainly not manifested when returning to a friend a sword borrowed from him if that friend has gone mad.¹² In each case, the Form of Justice determines the standard which a thing must meet in order to manifest justice, to be an instance of justice, but whether a particular thing which instantiates justice within one context does so in a different context is sensitive to the particulars of that context.¹³

But this does not preclude Plato from recognising that certain things can be in due measure without having a unique paradigm in the intelligible. As we will see, there does not need to be a Form of Speeches in order for there to be good speeches, speeches in due measure. In this way, Plato can maintain both that there are natural, objective and universal standards for the evaluation of such things as, say, justice and injustice and, more generally, good and bad people, as well as to hold that the products of arts and science can also be good and bad objectively and universally without it being the case that there are eternal Forms for every such product.

But we need to say what exactly it is for a thing to be in due measure, and how, moreover, being determines this. What does it mean for being to be ‘necessary’ for generation? And how does such a being determine the standard for the thing generated? Relatedly, if we judge a thing as being too much, too little, or just enough, what that *of which* it is too little, too much, or just the

¹² *Republic* 331c for this example.

¹³ This is not to say that Plato is a so-called ‘moral particularist’ according to whom moral truths cannot be expressed, or at least not usefully expressed, in generalisations which hold across all contexts. See Leibowitz 2013 for a discussion of whether *Aristotle* was what we would call a particularist. Though the paper does not concern Plato, given the many points of contact between Aristotle’s and Plato’s ethics there is interesting overlap here, too, in the question of particularism. In any case, this essay is neutral on whether Plato can be called a particularist.

right amount? This would seem to be like saying that the right amount of sleep for person is eight. Eight what? Since Plato is evidently concerned not with the generations of only individual, particular things, but with generation in general, we need to have a general way of determining in each case of measurement what the relevant 'scale' being used is. Relatedly, we need a general way of identifying what being, or part of the intelligible world, is relevant in a given case of measurement, or, in other words, to be able to identify which being is necessary in a given case of generation. Understanding how Plato answers these question will take us right the very heart of his thinking of good and evil and, indeed, of all things which are and come to be. But to get these answers it will be necessary to go outside the borders of *Statesman* and, ultimately, as we shall see, the dialogues altogether. The first stop, however, is to *Philebus*, where the metaphysics behind due measure is greatly clarified. Before this, however, let us clarify the results we have gained so far for Plato's theory of evil.

The discussion of *Statesman* has made it clear that Plato thinks normative judgements of things are a sort of measurement, and that this kind of measurement determines the character of a thing by comparison with certain being. But we have also seen that in at least some special cases he may not be committed to holding that there is a unique Form which determines the standard for a thing. There is reason to think, in other words, that Plato leaves room for standards which are not directly set by a particular being in the intelligible world. But, insofar as Plato is not a relativist, we can be sure that, even if there is room for this sort of standard, certainly not all standards are established in this way. In any case, have seen that something about being determines a certain proportion of greatness to smallness in extent is the right, fitting, appropriate proportion for a thing to be in. But at this stage, these are still very abstract considerations. We need to fill in important details with a substantive account of what makes a given extent in or out of due measure, and how

a thing gets to be in or out of due measure. Otherwise we are left with a view hardly more informative than one which holds that something is good when it is good and bad when it is not.

§3. *Due Measure in Philebus*

In *Philebus*, Socrates and his interlocutors Protarchus, and Philebus—apparently in the presence of an audience of young men—are trying to answer the question, What is the best life for human beings: the one spent in intellectual activity, or the one spent in pleasure? After some initial discussion, it is agreed that the most plausible candidate to focus upon is the life which contains a certain mixture of both intellectual activity and pleasurable pursuits.¹⁴ The discussion then shifts to determining which kind of life, intellectual or pleasant, lays claim to the *second-best* left by being most like the first best.

As an integral part of determining the answer to this new question, Socrates considers it necessary to introduce a division of ‘everything existing now in the all (πάντα τὰ νῦν ὄντα ἐν τῷ παντί)’ into four kinds:¹⁵ The four kinds identified are: (1) ‘the unlimited (τὸ ἄπειρον)’, (2) ‘the limit (τὸ πέρας)’, (3) ‘the individual thing resulting from the mixture (ἐν τι συμμισγόμενον)’ of limit with unlimited, and, finally, (4) ‘the cause (τὴν αἰτίαν)’ of the mixture.¹⁶ By the unlimited class, Socrates means any pair of contrary opposites—e.g., hotter, colder, stronger, weaker, wetter, drier, etc.—which by their very own natures are such as to be capable of an infinite variety of differences relative to each other. There is nothing within the nature of ‘the hotter’ as such which

¹⁴ *Philebus* 20b1-22c2. Socrates seems to accept this claim with some reservation, suggesting that the *human* life filled only with intellectual activities and with no pleasure is not the ideal life for humans, but may be for the ‘divine reason’.

¹⁵ *Philebus* 23c3-4. I think it better to render τῷ παντί as ‘the all’ rather than as ‘the universe’ because, as we shall see, Socrates does not obviously mean just things existing in the sensible world, which is what seems to me to be implied by the English ‘universe’. Thus, by ‘the all’ I take it to be an open question, at least at this point in the dialogue, as to whether or not he means the sensible universe or that together with the intelligible realm.

¹⁶ *Philebus* 23c-e.

entails the existence of some the maximum degree of hotness beyond which there can be nothing hotter. In the exact same way there is nothing within the nature of the colder which entails the existence of some the maximum degree of coldness beyond which there can be nothing colder. Pick any arbitrarily high degree of heat and there can always be a degree even higher. The same is true of the other pairs of contraries mentioned.

Plato evidently means this in the sense of a logical, or metaphysical possibility, rather than physical possibility. For one thing, when he begins his explanation of the unlimited class he begins with the question of whether Protarchus can even to think or conceive (νοήσαις) of there being any such limit in the nature of the hotter and colder in and of themselves. I take this to be an inference from conceivability to logical possibility. It seems hard to believe that would be making the implausible move of using conceivability as a guide to *physical* possibility rather than logical possibility. For another thing, even though obviously Plato had no idea of the existence of Absolute Zero—the temperature below which a physical thing’s temperature cannot go—he seems to accept that something is hot only if it has fire within it, and that there is a limited quantity of fire within the universe.¹⁷ But this is precisely his point: there can be a hottest possible, or coldest possible, temperature only if limits—e.g., a definite quantity given to fire—are imposed from ‘outside’. Thus, for Plato, if there is a limit to the degree of hotness, this limit is something imposed upon the intrinsically unlimited continuum of heat, that is, upon the ‘the hotter’.

So, in distinction to the unlimited, there are those things which do *not* admit of the more-and-less but exist within definite boundaries, that is, they are by their natures limited. Given the contrast between this class with the unlimited, it seems clear that members of this class therefore do not admit of the sort of variability characterising the unlimited. This is nicely captured by the

¹⁷ See *Philebus* 29b1-30a1.

idea that they are bounded: they exist within a certain finite ‘area’, so to speak, beyond which they do not go. They are defined by these boundaries. And these boundaries, the limits, are or cause things to have ‘definite quantity and measurement’. So, for example, ‘equality’, ‘double’, and ‘all that is related as number to number or measure to measure’, are by their very natures limited, definite, and measured, and therefore do not admit of degrees. For example, nothing which has the property of being double can have that property any more or any less than something else which has the property of being double: 8 and 4 both have the property *being double* to the exact same extent even though 8 is more than double that to which 4 is double, i.e., 2. Thus, to be a member of the second kind is to have the ‘character of limit’. It is important to note, however, that while a thing either is or is not, e.g., equal, things can nevertheless be said to be closer or farther from being equal despite not being equal. For example, 1 and 1.1 are closer to being equal to each other than are 1 and 10000, despite the fact that neither of these pairs are in fact equal.

The third class, that of the mixture, is what is *generated* from the imposition of limit upon the unlimited. Or, in other words, when something unlimited is limited, something comes to be which has the natures of both within it as it is the product of both. Limits are said to ‘put an end to the conflicts there are among opposites [i.e., among pairs of the unlimited contrary properties], making them commensurate and harmonious by imposing a definite number (σύμμετρα δὲ καὶ σύμφωνα ἐνθειῖσα ἀριθμὸν ἀπεργάζεται) on them’.¹⁸ When, for example, the hot and the cold are mixed with each according to a certain number or ration, the result—if it is a good one—will be the generation of a unified whole in which the hot and cold are harmonious and commensurate with each other because they will have been combined in a definite proportion, and this definite combination is the unified particular which comes to be as a result. When mixed in a particular

¹⁸ *Philebus* 25d11-e2.

ratio, the result is, say, spring or summer.¹⁹ What we would call phonemes, as well as musical notes, chords, modes, as well as music, health, beauty, excellent qualities in the soul, are all examples of things generated from the mixture of limit with unlimited.²⁰

An important question to ask here is whether just any mixture of unlimited and limit will result in the generation of something, or if only certain mixtures will. In her detailed discussion of *Philebus*, Dorothea Frede says, ‘It seems that for Plato not just *any* degree in the continuum of opposites will do, but that only harmonious and stable combinations deserve the title of a “mixture of limit and the unlimited.” For only such mixtures display the appropriate measure.’²¹ Frede seems to blur the distinction between being a mixture *simpliciter* and being a *good* mixture. But so long as Plato recognises that health in the body is generated by the ‘right combination (ὀρθὴ κοινωνία)’²² of opposites, he thereby recognises sickness as the *wrong* combination of those opposites. An improper combination is surely still a combination. Frede is correct, however, in pointing out that Plato thinks the right, harmonious, stable, mixture of proportions within a given continuum are all different ways of characterising the same thing, namely, the combination which is appropriately measured, viz., in due measure.

Finally, the fourth kind, the cause of mixture, is identified as the maker of said mixture. For ‘there is no difference’, argues Socrates, ‘between the nature of what makes and the cause, except in name, so that the maker and the cause would rightly be called one’.²³ Since all things which come to be come to be by some cause, all things which come to be are made, that is, the product of some maker.

¹⁹ *Philebus* 26b1-2.

²⁰ *Philebus* 17b1-e1, 25e7-26b8.

²¹ Frede 1992, 428.

²² *Philebus* 25e7.

²³ *Philebus* 26e.

The connections between this tetrad of kinds, i.e., limit, unlimited, mixture, and mixer/cause, connects with and clarifies in important ways the discussion of due measure in *Statesman*. It is clearly indicated that anything in the mixed class of things is generated, comes to be, as a result of the imposition of limit upon the unlimited by the agency of some cause. It also seems clear that things in the limited class and things in the unlimited class are ingredients or materials from which the maker makes its ‘products’, namely, things in the mixtures class. Now, to this picture Socrates adds that ‘every process of generation in turn always takes place for the sake of (ἕνεκα) some particular being, and that all generation taken together takes place for the sake of being as a whole’.²⁴ In this context the word ἕνεκα can mean ‘for the sake of’ as well as ‘because of’. Plato may be a process of becoming is initiated and carried out with the being as a goal, or that the being is in some way the responsible for the process of generation. Indeed, Protarchas’ clarification. Of Socrates’ question seems to give weight to the latter reading: ‘Whether what is called being is what it is for the sake of generation, is that what you want to know?’²⁵

The two meanings are very closely related, and Plato probably intends us to take both readings at once. Thus, what the lover does *qua* lover is dictated by the fact that he acts with the beloved as a goal, and it is because his actions are so guided by having a beloved as their end that he is a lover rather than, say, a painter. Similarly, ship-building involves the steps it involves and in the sequence in which it involves them because it aims at the generation of something with the nature of a ship, namely, a particular ship, and because it is a particular generative process taking the steps it takes in the order in which it takes them and with the building of a ship as its goal that makes that process one of ship-building and not, say, house-building. In the same way, a process

²⁴ *Statesman* 54c1-4. .

²⁵ *Ibid.* 54a10-11

of generation involves the steps which it involves in a particular order because it is aiming at generating a particular being, and it is the particular generative process it is because it takes those steps in that order for the sake of that being. For Plato, then, the generation of, say, a human being occurs as it does because the being of humanity dictates what steps must be taken and the order in which they must be taken, and a particular generative process is the process of generating a human being because it is so guided and because it has the generation of something with the being of a human, i.e., a particular human, as its goal. This is clearly expressed by Socrates in *Gorgias* when he says the following:

Well then, won't the good man, the man who speaks with regard to what's best, say whatever he says not randomly but with a view to something, just like the other craftsmen, each of whom keeps his own product in view and so does not select and apply randomly what he applies, but so that he may give his product some shape? Take a look at painters for instance, if you would, or housebuilders or ship-builders or any of the other craftsmen you like, and see how each one places what he does into a certain organization, and compels one thing to be suited for another and to fit to it until the entire object is put together in an organized and orderly way. The other craftsmen, too, including the ones we were mentioning just lately, the ones concerned with the body, physical trainers and doctors, no doubt give order and organization to the body. Do we agree that this is so or not?²⁶

It is clear, then, that natural and artificial generative processes aim at being and that these processes are teleologically and constitutively determined by the specific being at which they are aimed. In

²⁶ See *Gorgias* 503ef.

the case of natural things, however, such as a frog, there is a particular being, e.g., the Form of Frog, at which the process generating a frog aims. Is there, then, a Form of, say, Paintings, or a Form of Ship at which painting and ship-building aims? Surely Plato does not think so. How, then, are such things determined by being? It seems to be in following way.

The Forms establish natural patterns which determine whether things are beautiful naturally, good etc. But things which are not natural—e.g., products of art—and do not have a unique paradigm in the intelligible realm: there is no Form of Painting, as we said. It seems, rather, that the craftsman looks to many of ‘parts’ of being and blends the relevant parts into a unity which is the artefact. So, for example, David’s *Oath of the Horatii* is made by taking various shapes from the human body, colours, proportions, etc., and unites these into a whole that is, say, a painted image of a human standing in the sunlight. Each of these elements is itself made in the image of the relevant part of being—say, the Form of Man, the Form of Triangle, etc.—or is itself a composite image derived from other Forms, etc. In any case the elements and the ways they are combined are related to being. And, to the extent that they are, those elements and the wholes they form, can be beautiful and good. So, though there is no Form of Painting, if there is a Form of Man, a painting *of* a man is good or bad depending on whether its subject, the man, manifests the proportions and order determined by the Form of Man. Insofar as the painting does so accurately, it attains some measure of the being of man, and therefore manifests a degree of truth; and if it does so proportionately it will manifest and beauty.²⁷

²⁷ It is important to note that this way of explaining the truth-conditions for normative judgments about paintings would work best in the case of so-called ‘mimetic’ or representational art, it could still hold in the case of non-mimetic, abstract artwork. In the cubist paintings of Braques and Picasso, for example, geometrical shapes predominate, and, to that extent, participate in particular beings. Indeed, even the colours and composition bear some relation to being. So, perhaps, it is not so implausible to maintain that even these paintings have objective, universal beauty—rather than being beautiful subjectively in the eyes of various beholders—only by participating in being in some degree.

When a painting, or anything, manifests as a unity beauty, proportion, and truth, it is good, for these are expressed only by things good:

If we cannot capture the good in one form, we will have to take hold of it in a conjunction of three: beauty, proportion, and truth. Let us affirm that these should by right be treated as a unity and be held responsible for what is in the mixture, for its goodness is what makes the mixture itself a good one.²⁸

The goodness of the unity of beauty, truth, and proportion is what makes any mixture good. If, *per impossible*, something were created bearing no relation to any being, that thing would be purely ugly and entirely evil because it would have no truth, proportion, or beauty, and hence no goodness.²⁹ Something is good, then, to the extent that it manifests beauty, proportion, and truth. These three things are manifested to the extent that that which manifests them approximates the mean determined by the being for the sake of which that thing has been generated.

Given the relationship which Plato argues holds between processes of generation and the beings, namely, that such processes are teleologically and constitutively related to the intelligible world or particular parts of it, it would also seem to follow that there cannot even be anything properly called a generative *process*. For suppose there were no difference between apples and oranges. In that case, what would distinguish a tree which produces apples from a tree which produces oranges? If *a* intends to plant an apple tree, there is no non-arbitrary way for him to decide between seeds which produce apple trees and seeds which produce orange trees, because

²⁸ *Philebus* 65a-b1.

²⁹ And by the very same token, could not exist in the first place: for nothing which does not participate in some way in being can ever be generated. The one and only thing which can exist without partaking in being is the Good, and this is not generated.

there would be no difference between the seeds. There would therefore be no way to say whether he made the right or wrong choice. Moreover, if there were no difference between the being of these fruits, the processes which generate each one could not be distinguished, and it is in this sense that the being at which a process of generation determines the specific nature and identity of that process.

As another example, suppose that one does not know the difference between what is to be a chair and what it is to be a house. You pay this person to build you a house and to have it done before winter really sets in. Come the first real freeze you will be not a little displeased to find a chair on the lot where your house was to be. If there were in fact no difference between what it is to be a house and what it is to be a chair, there would be no objective, universal grounds to complain to the carpenter. She has done precisely what she thinks she was asked to do, and did it well: the chair is a very good one.

The difference between change and radical flux consists in the fact that only the former has a determinate beginning, middle, and end. The determinate end is the acquisition of a definite nature different from the one had at the initiation of the change. The same is true for generation. If there is no being the generation of which constitutes the end of the process of generation, then there is no process of generation, there is just unlimited fluctuation of the appearance of particular regions of space over time. For could it even be proper to call a process of generation or change a *process* if it was not constitutively and teleologically determined by a definite nature as its end? Insofar as a process necessarily has a beginning, middle, and end, there could be no processes because there would be no ends, no mid-points, and no beginnings. If someone is not creating anything in particular, for example—that is, they are not aiming at the production of something with a particular being, or for a particular reason—no particular being dictates what steps they

must take or the order in which they must take them, so there would be no non-arbitrary way to determine whether, say, the material being worked upon was getting closer or farther away from the objective; one could not say whether the process was nearing completion; and, more significantly, one would not be able to say whether a particular step was done well, at the right time, was the right step to take, etc., or, in a word, to make normative determinations about that thing.

If all generative processes require end-points, and being is what determines these end-points, then there can be no generative processes. Or, since end-points can be determined arbitrarily, there would be only subjective, relative, and arbitrarily imposed end-points and therefore subjectively, relatively, and arbitrarily defined beings and generative processes. At that point things collapse into pure relativism, for why should any one person agree any other on definitions of natural kinds and the with the particular end-points in processes of generation arbitrarily selected? There would be no objective or universal standard guiding one to do so. Here, now, we can see how the discussion in *Philebus* and *Statesman* begin to work together in important ways. In *Statesman* we discovered that the art of normative measurement concerns the comparison of the greatness and smallness in extent or degree (more/less) of some relevant continuum of opposites—e.g., in position (nearer/farther), time (shorter/longer)—in relation to ‘the being necessary for generation’, or to ‘the generation of what is in due measure’. Now we have seen that the class of mixed things comprises all things which come to be, and that everything which comes to be comes to be as a result of the imposition of a definite number, ratio, measure, or, in a word, limit, upon the unlimited.

Moreover, each particular process of generation is teleologically and constitutively determined by a particular being which is its end, such that without that being any generative

process is reduced to a mere fluctuating appearance in a certain location over time. Without some being to guide and determine a process of becoming, there is only relative differences in the extent of various qualities related in a purely mechanical causal relationship: there would be process such as the generation of a new human being if ‘human being’ is not a real thing, that is, does not name a real being or natural kind. Instead, all that we could say is ‘now there appears to be in that location a mass of cells in a certain configuration, and now a mass of cells in another configuration...’. We could not truly say that ‘now the cells have developed the structure of a heart, now the brain, now a human body...’ unless there is such a thing as cells, hearts, brains, human bodies, etc., which have real being as natural kinds.³⁰

If there is not a real being referred to by the name ‘heart’, if ‘heart’ is only applied on the basis of adventitious, stipulative criteria, rather than objective, universal differences between the nature of hearts and the natures of non-hearts, then in judging a particular heart against the standard of the stipulated definition of the being of a heart, any normative judgment would be as stipulative and adventitious as the definition of the being of the heart. To say a heart pumps enough blood is to make normative judgment because it is a determination of the extent to which that heart pumps blood—the ‘greatness or smallness’ of the quantity of blood it pumps—relative to a certain standard such as, say, how much blood is needed for the rest of the body to function well, where ‘function well’ is another normative judgment. If what it is for the body to function well is also merely stipulated, then what it is for a heart to pump enough blood is ultimately just as stipulative, and therefore a judgment about particular hearts as being good or bad, or working well or poorly, in terms of their abilities to pump blood can be true only when made relative to those stipulative

³⁰ Even if these are arbitrarily stipulated, the only truth we could attain would be the truth involved in pointing to a thing and saying ‘this meets our agreed-upon criteria for applying the word ‘human’, therefore we it is consistent to apply the name to it’, rather than, ‘the nature of this thing is the same as the nature of those other things which form the kind we have called ‘human’.

definitions. If there were other stipulative definitions, the same judgment could be true relative to one definition and false relative to the other, and the only reason to prefer one definition to the other, and thus to evaluate the judgment as true rather than false, is ultimately an arbitrary or subjective one which comes down to what definition the one judging accepts at the time of making the judgment.

It is not necessary, then, for there to be a Form of Speeches in order for there to be beautiful speeches. Nor must there be a Form of Bed in order for there to be a good bed. But a bed, speech, or painting is objectively and universally good not *qua* bed or *qua* speech, but *qua* something orderly, definite, self-sufficient, etc., That is, speeches and all artefacts are good, beautiful, etc., by resembling those properties in virtue of which natural things are beautiful and good. The painting is beautiful and good because the being from which the elements of the painting's subjects are drawn are beautiful, and because they are put together on the painting well, i.e., in a way that preserves order, being, and beauty.

Plato writes repeatedly that a speech is good only by being appropriately related to the intelligible and being constructed in an orderly, unified way, that is, by being true, proportional, and beautiful, and, hence, good. For example, at *Apology* 18a Socrates says that the excellence of a speaker lies in his ability speaking the truth. Socrates' speech in *Symposium*, unlike those made by the others, finishes to great applause, indicating its superiority to theirs. His is superior because it is the best and most beautiful because it gives a true account of the most beautiful thing, beauty itself. At *Phaedrus* 242e Socrates laments that his earlier speeches have been awful because they have been untrue. At *Timaeus* 29b-d Timaeus says that 'the accounts we give of things have the same character as the subjects they set forth. So accounts of what is stable and fixed and transparent to understanding are themselves stable and unshifting', and, therefore owing to what has been said

above, beautiful and good. By contrast, he adds, ‘accounts we give of that which has been formed to be like that reality, since they are accounts of what is a likeness, are themselves likely, and stand in proportion to the precious accounts: what being is to becoming, truth is to convincingness’. These examples show that even in things for which there is not a particular Form, the intelligible realm still determines the standards by which a thing is beautiful and good or ugly and bad. Whatever is truly good here is so only by being related in some way to the intelligible, because everything there is true, proportionate, and beautiful, and hence good.

When the Visitor says that the art of normative measurement concerns the measurement of a thing in relation to the being necessary for generation, he means the being necessary for *its* generation, that is, the being for the sake of which it comes to be. This being therefore is what determines which properties a thing should have, and the proportion in which it should have it, and the arrangement they should have. A thing is in due measure to the extent that it meets these criteria. A particular thing is therefore *good* to the extent that it meets the standards set by the relevant part or parts of being. On the flip side of this, then, we can say precisely that evil in the most fundamental sense is divergence from the mean established by the being or beings for the sake of which what comes to be comes to be. A thing is more evil if it diverges more from the relevant mean, and a thing is better the closer it gets. When a thing is generated, as *Philebus* makes clear, it is generated by the imposition of limit upon the unlimited, where the unlimited the class of things which are by nature characterised by ‘the Great and Small’. For something to come into being it is necessary, then, for some limit, determined by the relevant part of being, to be imposed upon the right members of the unlimited, in the right proportion, in the right arrangement, as this is determined by the being for the sake of which it comes to be.

When the thing is generated in a way that fits the mean, when it is in due measure, it manifests, as much as something in that material can, unity, truth, proportion, and beauty, and is therefore good. For the unity of these things is the mark of the good, and that in virtue of which anything is good. And things only manifest them to the extent that they are in due measure, that is, resemble the being. Evil, then, turns out to be a sort of privation: difference with respect to the being for the sake of which a thing comes to be, and hence the absence of what should be in a thing given its identity as the specific kind of thing it is. Evil, ugliness, disorder, and falsity, thus all go together as the opposite of the good, beauty, order, and truth. Evil, then, is in fact an absence of what should be. But what should be is being, and, with it, truth, in beautiful proportion. Therefore, evil is the non-being relative to the being which is the paradigm in the intelligible for the sake a generated thing is generated.

This is the essence of evil. Strictly speaking, though, there is no 'essence' of evil. To have an essence is, in the case of the intelligible world, to be eternally in perfect due measure, and in the case of the sensible world, to partake of due measure by manifesting the essence of the being which teleologically and constitutively determines the character of the thing generated. Since evil is the difference in a thing with respect to the ideal due measure of the relevant being, evil is difference with respect to that relevant being. Pure evil would therefore be difference with respect to all being, that is, pure, and total non-being. We can thus say that a thing is good to the extent that it manifests the perfect order, beauty, and truth of eternal being, and evil to the extent that fails to manifest this, manifesting instead ugliness, disorder, falsity, and endless flux.

CHAPTER TWO

The Origin of Evil

We have seen that Plato thinks that evil is divergence from the mean, and that this means not being as stable, complete, beautiful, and orderly a unity as it is possible for a generated thing of a given kind to be within the limits of the material from which it is made. Particular Forms, and Being generally, determine what the due measure for given things are. Thus, a thing good only insofar as it resembles the relevant Forms. The better an image of the Forms it is, the better it is. Normative judgements, therefore, compare a thing with the being that determines its due measure, and determine its goodness or badness on the basis of that comparison. But how is it possible for a thing to fall short of the mean? What accounts for difference from the mean in, say, the world of plants? What, in other words, explains why being is not necessarily perfectly expressed in matter? Or, to put it another way, what is it about the material world that makes material things resistant to the imposition of order, and thus goodness? To answer this question is to answer the question

of how evil is possible, for it is precisely the resistance of matter to the order brought to it by Forms which explains why material things ever fall short of the perfection which they would have if they were perfectly amenable to what they receive from the Forms. The resistance of matter is what explains the possibility of things diverging from their relevant means, and, thus, it is the resistance of matter which explains the possibility of evil, of things failing to be as perfect as they good be.

A natural place to being searching for the answer to this question is in *Timaeus*. For *Timaeus* contains Plato's most sustained, detailed discussion of the origin of the cosmos as a whole as well as the things within it.³¹ And although Plato nowhere in *Timaeus* explicitly labels something as the root of all evil in the universe, he nevertheless does all but point to it. For there is much which leads us to the identity of that root, which is, it turns out, an essential ingredient in the generation of all things which come to be, including the cosmos itself, namely, the disorderly 'receptacle (ὑποδοχή)'.³² As we will see, this is the same as what in *Philebus* was called the Great-and-Small. We are given a much more intimate look, however, into what it is about the Great-and-Small that explains divergence from the mean, i.e., evil. Indeed, in many ways *Timaeus* is an extended demonstration of the doctrine of due measure and the importance it plays for the existence of all generated things.

§1. *Timaeus and the Receptacle*

The better part of this dialogue is taken up by the titular character, Timaeus, giving a 'likely account' of creation. Timaeus begins with the familiar Platonic distinction between Being and

³¹ Taylor 1928, 11-27 denies that *Timaeus* contains any Platonic doctrine. Rather, he thinks, the dialogue is merely meant to express Pythagorean doctrine with which Plato *might* have agreed, and, according to Taylor, there is no evidence to claim that 'any theory propounded by Timaeus would have been accepted by Plato as it stands' (19, emphasis in text). See Cornford 1937, viii-xii against this 'new Taylorian heresy'.

³²*Timaeus* 49a6

Becoming, as well as, apparently, the attendant distinction between understanding and belief: the former takes only Being as its object, and the latter takes only Becoming as its object.³³ We then get a brief argument for the fact that 1) the universe was generated, and did not always exist, and 2) it was generated by a divine ‘craftsman’, the so-called Demiurge, who made it in the likeness of a certain perfect eternal model. Timaeus then proceeds with his account in earnest, beginning with a compressed statement how the universe was created and why the Demiurge created it:

This, more than anything else, was the preeminent reason for the origin of the world’s coming to be. The god [i.e., the Demiurge] wanted everything to be good and nothing to be bad so far as that was possible, and so he took over all that was visible—not at rest but in discordant and disorderly motion—and brought it from a state of disorder to one of order, because he believed that order was in every way better than disorder.³⁴

This passage is portentous for understanding Plato’s view of cosmology, and not only that found within the confines of *Timaeus*. For what is said here and elsewhere in the dialogue seems to lead Plato into contradiction with himself. Here again Timaeus is explicit that the cosmos has an origin, that it was generated.³⁵ But some important information has been filled in. Apparently, the universe was created not *ex nihilo* but *ex materia*: the Demiurge created it *from* something which was already there, namely, the ‘visible all’. I shall refer to this ‘visible all’ as the ‘primitive universe’. No indication is given here that the Demiurge himself created the primitive universe. It is important also to note that no intermediate steps are mentioned between his having the desire to create the

³³ The adverb ‘only’ here is supplied based on the fact that this distinction is clearly supposed to be the same as that in *Republic* 476e-479e. See Gonzalez, 1996, *contra* Fine 1978, 1990, on the proper interpretation of this argument.

³⁴ *Timaeus* 29e1-30c1.

³⁵ Cf. *Phaedrus* 245d1-2.

universe and his creating the universe. Timaeus does not indicate that the Demiurge first created the primitive universe and only then formed the cosmos from it. Indeed, that is why the Demiurge is said to ‘take over’ the visible, and to ‘lead it’ out of disorder into existence as a cosmos, literally, an ordered whole (κόσμον). Thus the *bona fide* cosmos is primitive universe in a well-ordered state. I shall use ‘the cosmos’ to refer only to the result of the Demiurge’s imposition of order upon the primitive universe, i.e., to the ordered whole he creates from it.

Not only does Timaeus indicate that the primitive universe existed independently of the Demiurge’s creativity, but he is also explicit that it was ‘not at rest but in discordant and disorderly motion’. Now, in other dialogues Plato expresses his apparently firm conviction that there is something which is innately capable of causing its own motion and is therefore able to be the ultimate source of ‘all change (μεταβολῆς) and motion (κινήσεως) in everything’.³⁶ This ‘something’ is the soul. Let us refer to this thesis concerning soul as the ultimate source of motion and change the ‘prime-mover thesis’. Also in the *Laws* passage whence comes this quotation, Plato writes that there are ‘roughly’ ten kinds of motion, and though it is not exactly clear which type or types of motion the primitive universe in *Timaeus* is supposed to be in, the very fact that it is in any motion at all, even disorderly motion, seems to entail that some soul has caused it to be in that condition.

Which soul, then, causes the motion of the primitive universe? Since the disorderly motion of the primitive exists prior to the Demiurge’s creation of anything, including the World-Soul and the souls of the Heavenly Bodies, it would seem that only Demiurge himself is the only candidate for the cause of that motion. And, indeed, there is good reason to think that the Demiurge is a certain kind of soul, namely, a divine intellect, and so could in principle be the cause of that

³⁶ *Laws* 896b1; ‘change’ is evidently treated as a type of motion. See also *Phaedrus* 245c4-e9. Plato seems to allude to this view even within *Timaeus* at 468-e2.

motion.³⁷ But as we have just seen, the primitive universe *and* its motion seem to exist independently of the Demiurge. Thus, Plato seems to hold both that some kind of soul must be the original source of all motion and that something—the primitive universe—was in a state of motion seemingly uncaused by any soul.

I should like to pause here to say how the issue of potential inconsistency on this point bears upon the Plato's account of the origin of evil in the world. As was mentioned above, it is going to turn out that the Receptacle is what accounts for the possibility of things diverging from their means, and thus accounts for the possibility of evil in general. As we will shortly see, the motion in the primitive universe is the motion of the Receptacle, and it is the fact that the Receptacle is in motion which explains how things can deviate from the mean, i.e., how evil comes to be in the cosmos. But if Plato's view of the source of that motion is itself inconsistent, then, insofar as that motion is indispensable to his account of origin of evil, Plato's account of the origins of evil is inconsistent. If Plato had an inconsistent view of the origins of evil, then insofar as 'having a theory of evil' means having a consistent, unified view of what evil is and what its origin is, if Plato had multiple, inconsistent views about the origin of evil, then we seem only to be able to say that Plato had multiple theories—or, perhaps, 'hypotheses'—concerning evil, even if he had a consistent view about what the character of evil was and how it is possible for things to be evil.

But before we can reach any such conclusion, we need to investigate whether the apparent inconsistency cannot be revealed as being merely apparent. It will be necessary, then, to look more closely at *Timaeus* as well as at the doctrine that soul is the primary source of all motion. There

³⁷ *Timaeus* 47e where the Demiurge is identified with Intellect. See *Laws* 897d3 where 'intellect's motion (νοῦ κίνησις)' is the most powerful kind of motion, motion capable of both self-motion and other-motion, and, indeed, is responsible for the movement and order of all of the cosmos. This would seem to mean that, if Demiurge causes the disorderly motion in the primitive universe, it would be consistent with the doctrine that soul, including the intellectual soul, must be the cause motion. A stumbling-block for this interpretation, however, is the fact that the Demiurge cannot be responsible for creating anything evil, so if the disorderly motion is evil, he cannot be its cause.

are two principal approaches which can be taken here. Either (a) the prime-mover thesis must be shown to be somehow consistent with the Timaeian account to preclude the existence of some motions or kinds of motion without the causality of soul, or that (b) the statements in *Timaeus* about the pre-cosmic motion can be shown to be in harmony with the prime-mover doctrine in its strongest form, or else (c) show that Plato cannot plausibly be shown to have been consistent on this point.³⁸

§2. *Temporal and Ontological Priority*

Many commentators ancient and modern have held that *Timaeus* must not be read so literally as to support the conclusion that Plato believed that the universe had a *temporal* origin. That is, Plato cannot be supposed to have believed there was a particular moment in time before which the cosmos did not exist and after which it did.³⁹ Perhaps the greatest support for this view comes from the sheer implausibility of holding that Plato failed to recognise the incoherence of maintaining that the primitive universe is the cosmos as it exists *temporally* prior to the activity of the Demiurge. *Timaeus* is explicit that time and the cosmos ‘were begotten together’.⁴⁰ To maintain that cosmos was created at a particular moment in time is to maintain that moments in time existed despite the non-existence of time. The existence of time is a pre-condition for the existence of moments of time and so for the occurrence *in* time. To avoid attributing this error to Plato, then, it is argued, some other, non-literal sense of priority must be meant. So, when, for example, we are told later in *Timaeus* that three ‘kinds (γέννη)’ must be adduced in order to explain adequately the

³⁸ See, e.g., Meldrum 1950; Mohr 1978; Nightingale 1996 for different versions of (c).

³⁹ See, e.g., Cornford 1937; Taylor 1928 for views of this sort.

⁴⁰ *Timaeus*. 38b6.

creation and character of the world—namely, Being, Becoming, and ‘Space (χώρον)’—and that these three existed ‘even prior to heaven [i.e., the cosmos] being generated (καὶ πρὶν οὐρανὸν γενέσθαι),’⁴¹ Plato cannot be understood as using ‘prior (πρὶν)’ to mean prior *in time*.

What sense of priority are we to take him to mean, then? Interestingly, there is external evidence that shows Plato did recognise and make use of a non-temporal sense of ‘priority’, namely, ontological priority. Aristotle, himself distinguishing the various senses in which a thing can be said to be prior to something else, tells us that some things are said to be prior ‘in nature and substance, when it is possible for them to be without other things, but not the others without them—a distinction used by Plato’.⁴² As Aristotle writes, something *x* is ontologically prior to something *y* just in case the nature of *x* and the nature of *y* are such that *x* can exist without *y* but not *y* without *x*. This means that the existence of *y* is ontologically dependent upon the existence of *x* but not *vice versa*. So, for example, there can be nothing which is in third place without there being something which is in second place, whereas there can be something in second place without their being anything in third place. This would be the case in a sequence with exactly two members. Thus, something can be in second place without anything being in third, but not vice versa, and, hence, being in third place is ontologically posterior and dependent upon there being something in second place.

Armed with this sense of priority, when Timaeus gives an argument for the claim that the cosmos has come to be, has an origin, and has not always existed, we can understand this in terms of the distinction between ontological priority and posteriority.⁴³ That is, we can say, that the

⁴¹ *Timaeus*. 52d3-4.

⁴² *Metaphysics* Δ 11, 1019a1-4. He seems also to indicate that the other sense of priority which he specifies are themselves ontologically posterior to the ontological sense of priority. On the reliability of Aristotle’s testimony see Gerson 2013, esp. ch.4.

⁴³ *Timaeus*. 28b7-c4.

cosmos is generated *non-temporally* in the sense that the existence of the cosmos has a necessary condition in the existence of the Demiurge and not vice versa. In order for it to be at all, a certain condition must ‘already’ be there, namely, the Demiurge, and without which it could not exist, even though there is no *time* at which it did not exist. Similarly, to say that the universe had an origin means, in the ontological sense, that its existence is dependent upon the existence of something else the existence of which is not dependent upon *its* existence. Suppose a cube exists outside of time. This cube cannot exist without the planes which make up its sides. Yet, *ex hypothesi*, there is no time at which the cube did not exist, and, so, there is no temporal process at the end of which the sides making up the sides of the cube come to constitute the cube. Nevertheless, it is still the case that the cube ‘is generated out of’ its sides, it cannot exist without them. It is thus ontologically dependent upon them, while they are independent of it. They are thus ontologically prior to the cube even though no temporal properties can be predicated of the sides or the cube.

Recognising this special sense of priority, we can make sense of many of the expressions which seem to involve temporality outside of time itself. Thus, even though we cannot say that the cosmos is generated at a moment in time, it does not follow that we cannot say that the cosmos was not generated *in any sense*. Therefore, we are not forced right away into accepting a non-literal reading of *Timaeus*, into thinking that the discussion of ‘generation’ of the World-Soul or the cosmos itself must be a fictional account. On the contrary, the recognition of ontological priority as being at play in at least some parts—obviously not *every* time Plato writes of generation in the dialogue does he mean non-temporal, ontological generation—makes it possible, at least in principle, to accept a literal reading of those parts.

However, though the introduction of ontological priority does enable us to make sense of how Plato can maintain such things as, say, that some things—e.g., Space, Being, and Becoming—existed ‘prior’ to the creation of time, the solution will not work to solve the issue of how there can be disorderly motion prior to the existence of soul. If we are going to say that the primitive universe exists *ontologically* rather than *temporally* prior to the existence or causality of soul, this seems to be a worse option for Plato. For to say that the primitive chaos is ontologically prior to the existence of soul would mean that the chaos can exist independently of soul whereas soul cannot exist independently of that chaos, that is, that the existence of soul is somehow dependent upon the existence of the disorderly primitive universe. This would be a monstrous conclusion in Plato’s eyes, and it is precisely this point against which Plato is concerned to argue in the first proof of the tenth book of *Laws*: soul is ontologically prior to matter.⁴⁴ More simply, it goes against the grain of Plato’s entire philosophical thought to accept that the immaterial order of things is not superior in every way to the material as would not be the case were it to be ontologically dependent upon the material.

We might instead maintain that the primitive universe is not ontologically *prior* to, but ontologically *independent* of, the soul.⁴⁵ This would mean that the primitive universe exists whether or not any kind of soul does. And this does accord with the initial impression one gets when reading the passage from *Timaeus* with which we began, namely, that the Demiurge in particular does not create the primitive universe or the chaos which characterises it. The problem is that this interpretation frees Plato from the contradiction involved in asserting the existing of a

⁴⁴ That Plato is here also dealing in ontological, not temporal, priority seems clear from the fact that the argument against the atheist is supposed to show that the motion of lifeless matter cannot exist without the causality of self-generating motion, i.e., soul, whereas self-generating motion can exist independently of mechanical motion. Hence, the argument is meant to show that material motion is dependent upon spiritual motion and not the other way round, which is to say that the former is ontologically dependent upon the latter.

⁴⁵ Meaning ‘soul’ here in the extended sense that includes intellect and non-intellectual soul.

time before time as well as allowing him to maintain that the intelligible realm is not dependent upon the chaos of the primitive universe, nevertheless this takes us right back to square one: how can there be anything in motion prior to *or* independently of soul, if soul is the cause of all motion and change?

§3. *Non-Literal Interpretations of Timaeus*

The conflict between the prime-mover thesis and the existence disorderly motion in the primitive universe has not been resolved by understanding the sense in which the latter is prior to the causality of soul. If these two are to be harmonised, then something must give. An alternative way in which some commenters have tried to reconcile *Timaeus* with the prime-mover thesis is by opting for non-literal reading of *Timaeus*.

F. M. Cornford, for example, in his insightful commentary on the dialogue, argues that the disorderly motion which is supposed to have characterised the primitive universe must be taken to be ‘in some sense, an abstraction—a picture of some part of the cosmos, as it exists at all times, with the works of Reason [the Demiurge] left out’.⁴⁶ That is, according to Cornford’s view, when Plato tells us that the Demiurge leads the primitive universe from disorderly into orderly motion and all suchlike indications that the primitive universe was in motion independently of any soul, we are supposed to understand this as indicating that the World-Soul and its World-Body would, if abandoned by the providence of the Demiurge, collapse into a state of utter disorder. The motion of the primitive universe is merely a symbol for that fact, according to Cornford.

⁴⁶ Cornford 1937, 203.

To be clear, Cornford rightly recognises that the Receptacle/Space exist independently of the Demiurge. But Cornford seems to think that Plato's attributing to the Receptacle in this primitive 'phase' a state of disorder is nothing but an abstraction meant to illustrate that, without the guidance of the Demiurge to set the intelligence of the World-Soul aright, the cosmos would be bound to plunge into disorder and chaos. Indeed, he thinks this is precisely what is conveyed by the myth of the opposing cosmic cycles in *Statesman*: a picture of the world 'without the guidance of Reason'.⁴⁷ Cornford's interpretation, and, indeed, any interpretation which takes the primordial chaos to be a metaphorical rather than a real part of the cosmos runs into grave difficulties which turn upon a simple point: the disorder of the primitive universe, of the Receptacle, is a necessary condition for the existence of the sensible world. To think of this as merely an abstraction is to eliminate that in virtue of which it is able to be the Receptacle, a necessary condition for the existence of the sensible world. We get a pregnant description of the primitive motion—whether 'abstract' or real—with the following, which I shall quote in full:

Now as the wetnurse of becoming [i.e., the receptacle/space] turns water and fiery and receives the character of earth and air, and as it acquires all the properties that come with these characters, it takes on a variety of visible aspects, but because it is filled with powers that are neither similar nor evenly balanced, no part of it is in balance. It sways irregularly in every direction as it is shaken by those things [the powers?], and being set in motion it in turns shakes them. And as they are moved, they drift continually, some in one direction and others in others, separating from one another. They are winnowed out, as it

⁴⁷ See Cornford 1937, 206. For his interpretation of the *Statesman* myth, 206-209. See Nightingale 1996 for a detailed discussion of the *Statesman* myth in connection with the cosmological features both of *Timaeus* and of *Laws*, and criticism of Cornford's interpretation of it in particular.

were, like grain that sifted by winnowing basket or other such implements. They are carried off and settle down, the dense and heavy ones in one direct, and the rare and light ones to another place.

That is how at that time the four kinds were being shaken by the receiver, which was itself agitating like a shaking machine, separating the kinds most unlike each other furthest apart and pushing those most like each other closest together into the same region. This, of course, explains how these different kinds came to occupy different regions of space, even before the universe was set in order and constituted from them at its coming to be. Indeed, it is a fact that before this took place the four kinds all lacked proportion and measure, and at the time the ordering of the universe was undertaken, fire, water, earth, and air initially possessed certain traces of what they are now. They were indeed in the condition one would expect thoroughly god-forsaken things to be in. So, finding them in this natural condition, the first thing the god then did was to give them their distinction shapes using forms and numbers.

Here is a proposition we shall always affirm above all else: the god fashioned these four kinds to be as perfect and excellent as possible, when they were not so before.⁴⁸

It must be admitted, I think, that reading this passage makes it more and more difficult to accept the interpretation of Cornford and others that Plato is speaking only metaphorically when he says repeatedly and so strongly, ‘Here is a proposition we shall always affirm above all else: the god fashioned these four kinds to be as perfect and excellent as possible, when they were not so before’. If he means this metaphorically, and he intends us to understand that he means this metaphorically,

⁴⁸ *Timaeus* 52d4-53b7.

he is surely going about it in a peculiar way by emphatically saying the exactly opposite and stating it with the force of an axiom. In any case, the view that makes the motion of the receptacle purely abstract or hypothetical ignores the fact that this motion is responsible for the receptacle's being able to *be* the receptacle. We shall discuss below how the ability of the receptacle to be forever available to receive into it new images of Forms depends upon the reality of its disorderly motion.

§4. The Prime-Mover Thesis

The dialogue *Laws* is a lengthy one, apparently Plato's last,⁴⁹ in which Clinias of Crete, Megilus of Sparta, and the Athenian Stranger discourse about 'constitutions and laws'. Though Clinias, and Megilus—more so the former than the latter—are intellectually capable interlocutors, it becomes evident that they, unlike the Athenian, are not philosophers. It is thus the Athenian who, in general, presides over the discussion.⁵⁰

In book ten of *Laws*, having already discussed the forms of and justifications for a great many laws concerning various kinds of behaviour, the discussion turns to laws against impiety. He begins, as he has for each preceding law, with a 'preamble' which is supposed to make more amenable the citizens whom the laws constrain. The preamble for the laws against impiety amounts to a chain of reasoning for three conclusions: gods exist, they concern themselves with human affairs, and the activity of the gods cannot be altered by prayer or supplications. These proofs, as preambles, are meant gently 'to persuade (*πείθειν*)' the atheists into believing the three positions just mentioned.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Diogenes Laertius, III.37

⁵⁰ E.g., *Laws* 892d_f where the Athenian several times points out that the argument they are there engaged in is a tricky one for Clinias and Megilus, and that they must rely on his expertise to navigate it successfully.

⁵¹ *Laws* 890c6.

The target of this first proof is the atheist who denies the reality of gods because he thinks that divine providence, intelligent design, or reference to anything other than the physical is explanatorily otiose because a perfectly adequate explanation of the existence, nature, and behaviour of the world and the things within it—e.g., the seasons, planets, stars, and all living things—can in principle be attained by reference only to the random, mechanical interactions of material bodies and their properties.⁵² The Athenian’s proof for the existence of god is thus meant to demonstrate that this materialist doctrine is explanatorily inadequate precisely because it does not have recourse to anything outside of the material order. That is, the Athenian aims to show that unless one recognises the existence of at least the immaterial soul, it is impossible to explain how material things and their properties interact, and therefore impossible to give an ultimate or adequate explanation for the things which supposedly result from those interactions. If the existence and properties of matter are inexplicable, then there is no way give an adequate, or complete, explanation of other things in terms of them, according to the Athenian. For it would be something like trying to how earthquakes, say, destroy buildings, without knowing anything about tectonic plates.

The Athenian therefore intends to persuade the atheist into believing the existence of god, the immaterial order, and the ontological dependence of the material upon the immaterial by demonstrating that, in particular, the *motion* of material things depends upon the motion of immaterial things, namely, souls. If motion in material things cannot exist without the existence and causality of souls, then anything which comes about from that motion—which is, according to the atheist, everything—ultimately depends upon the existence and causality of soul.

⁵² See *Laws* 889a1-890bc.

In order to show that the motion of material bodies, that is, bodies without soul, depends upon the causality of immaterial bodies the Athenian begins with the claims that some things move, others remain at rest, and ‘there must be some space in which the stationary object remain at rest, and those in motion move’.⁵³ We then get a list of ten forms of motion which is supposedly exhaustive. The ninth and tenth items on this list are in fact two powers or capacities for causing the other forms of motion.⁵⁴ The ninth kind of motion is the capacity to move other things but not oneself, and the tenth kind is the capacity both to move other things and to move oneself.

The Athenian’s argument seems to run as follows:⁵⁵

1. There can be no uncaused motion, that is, motion caused neither by itself nor by something else.
2. Self-causing motion is the definition of soul.
3. Something is alive if and only if it can cause its own motion.
4. Something can cause its own motion if and only if it is/has a soul.
5. Therefore, something is alive if and only if it is/has a soul.
6. Matter is in itself lifeless.⁵⁶
7. Therefore, matter is not/does not have soul.
8. Therefore, the motion of any material thing is caused by something other than itself.
9. The cause of any of motion in any material thing is either i) material or ii) not material.
10. If (i), the motion in *that* thing is caused something else that is either (i) or (ii).

⁵³ *Laws* 890c5.

⁵⁴ The other eight forms of motions are, in order: rotation, locomotion, disintegration, integration, growth, diminution, generation, and destruction. See 893c3-894c1.

⁵⁵ *Laws* 894e1-c5 for this part of the proof of god’s existence.

⁵⁶ This is part of what it means for matter to be prior to soul.

11. A chain of motion in which any two subsequent members m_n and m_{n+1} are such that neither can cause its own motion and m_{n+1} is caused to be in motion by m_n is an infinite chain of motion unless there is some member s of that chain which is capable of causing its own motion and causes m_n to be in motion.
12. There are no infinite chains of motion. (Assumption)
13. Therefore, for any chain of motion there must be some member of that chain which causes both its own motion and the motion in at least one other member in that chain which cannot cause its own motion.
14. The thing capable of causing its own motion is the soul.
15. Therefore, there must be at least one soul that is the cause of at least the initial motion of at least one material thing which may or may not itself cause the motions in the rest of the material world, thereby forming a chain of motion with each material thing as a member.
16. Therefore, soul exists and all motion in matter is ultimately dependent upon its causality.

Having shown that soul must exist and is ultimately responsible for the motion in the material world, the Athenian proceeds to show how reason, intellect, planning, and suchlike naturally comes with the soul, and not matter; that the order in the universe is better explained in terms of the operation of intellect and reasoning, and therefore of the operation of some soul or something with soul; and that the name 'god' is given to an immaterial soul which orders and governs the world through reason and suchlike; and, therefore, god exists.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ See 908b3-e4 for the punishment of the atheist for his impiety.

The Athenian claims that this argument shows that ‘soul is prior to matter (ψυχὴν μὲν προτέραν γεγονέναι σώματος ἡμῶν)’.⁵⁸ But even assuming the argument is sound, all that it has shown is that the soul is prior to the *motion* in matter, not necessarily to the existence of matter *simpliciter*. It would be consistent with the above argument to maintain that matter in and of itself exists independently of soul whether or not any *motion* in it would require soul. If, in other words, matter can exist without being in motion, then the argument has not demonstrated that soul is necessarily prior to matter at rest. True, a materialist explanation of the cosmos and its contents would almost certainly be untenable if it could not avail itself of motion without introducing soul and thereby contradicting itself. The Athenian would, then, have succeeded in refuting the atheist in this way assuming his argument to be sound. But it is hard to believe that Plato is willing to leave this argumentative gap in this discussion. It seems hard to believe, in other words, that Plato missed, or was not concerned to address, the fact that his argument does not show soul to be prior to matter *simpliciter* rather than just to matter in motion.

We need to understand a bit more clearly what Plato has in mind when discussing ‘matter (σῶμα)’ here. When the Athenian gives a precise explanation of the position of the atheist against whom he intends to argue, he puts it thus:

I’ll put it more precisely. They [i.e., the atheists] maintain that fire, water, earth, and air owe their existence to nature and chance, and in no case to an art, and that it is by means of these entirely inanimate substances that the secondary physical bodies—the earth, sun, moon, and stars—have been produced. These substances [i.e. the four elements] moved at random, each impelled by virtue of its own inherent properties, which depended on various

⁵⁸ *Laws* 896c1-2 *et passim*.

suitable amalgamations of hot and cold, dry and wet, soft and hard, and all the other haphazard combinations that inevitably resulted when the opposites [i.e., contrary properties] were mixed. This is the process to which all the heavens and everything that is in them owe their birth, and the consequent establishment of the four seasons led to the appearance of all plants and living creatures. The cause of all this, they say, was neither intelligent planning, nor a deity, nor art, but—as we’ve explained—nature and chance.⁵⁹

It is important to understand exactly what it is about this that the Athenian disputes about this account. There is no reason to think that he disputes the claims that fire, water, earth, and air exist, that the bodies of the sun and earth are composed of them, that these elements have inherent properties depend upon mixtures of various contraries, or that the heavens and everything in them, as well as the seasons and living things, are in an important way dependent for their generation upon the characters and interactions of these elements. The only parts of this that he obviously does deny is the claim that these came about *by chance and nature* rather than by divine providence. Moreover, when Clinias responds by saying that they must be sure to argue as much as necessary in order ‘to back up the old doctrine that the gods exist, and to support the other arguments you ran through just now’,⁶⁰ the ‘other arguments’ to which Clinias refers evidently include the above claims save for the impious materialism involved in stopping short of the recognition of the absolutely necessary role played therein by the divine. In other words, the Athenian seems to accept this story except for the most crucial part, namely, the assertion that it could happen without the divine and the intelligible realm.

⁵⁹ *Laws* 889b1-c6.

⁶⁰ *Laws* 890d1-8.

If this is correct, then we should interpret ‘matter’ as referring not to the underlying ‘material’ substrate that is the pairs of contrary opposites such as the hot and cold from which the elemental bodies are formed. Rather, we should instead interpret ‘matter’ as referring to those elemental bodies and all bodies in general. If we interpret the argument this way, the Athenian would be correct in thinking his argument has proven the priority of soul over matter in the sense of three-dimensional material solids, i.e., the elements and all things composed of them. Consider that one of the ten kinds of motion, generation, must be involved when the particular elemental bodies are constructed from the underlying substrates which give them their sensible properties. That is, the first motions which the elements will undergo is the motion which is their initial generation. The materialist wants to maintain that this motion is explicable by chance and nature, and that once the elements have come into being, chance and nature will eventually ‘guide’ them to the creation of more and more complex physical bodies like planets, stars, humans, etc.

The Athenian wants to deny, as we have said, that this can happen without the intervention or guidance of soul and intelligible reality. All that is necessary to reach the desired conclusion is to demonstrate that, without soul, the generation of *unified* bodies, including the elements could not occur. Having shown this, he would have shown that the elements could not come to be without the existence and causality of soul and therefore, as we said, he would have shown that soul is prior to ‘matter’ in the sense of physical solids. This leaves open, however, a very interesting possibility. If it were the case that the pairs of contraries underlying the properties of all material bodies were themselves in a sort of motion which, in and of itself, could not give rise to any unity or stability, then these pairs of contraries could be in motion and yet never be able to generate elemental bodies. For the elemental bodies are certainly unified and stable, although, of course, not unqualifiedly so. If one adds to this the claim that the existence and causality of soul is a

necessary condition for anything unified or stable to be constructed out of those underlying pairs of contraries, then one will have i) shown that soul is prior to ‘matter’ in the sense of three-dimensional solids constructed from the relevant underlying pairs of contraries, while allowing ii) that a certain kind of motion which is ‘unity and stability averse’, as it were, can exist in the underlying pairs of contraries.

That Plato does intend to restrict the prime-mover thesis to the priority of soul to physical bodies—including the body of the ordered whole that is the cosmos—and not to the contraries which act as the substrates for these bodies can be seen in the following. The Athenian says in two places that a proof for soul’s priority to matter entails the priority of things closely related to soul to things closely related to matter. In the first instance, he elaborates thusly, ‘opinion, diligence, reason, art, and law will be prior to roughness and smoothness, heaviness and lightness.’⁶¹ In the second instance, the Athenian: ‘habits, customs, will, calculation, right opinion, diligence and memory will be prior creations to material length, breadth, depth, and strength’.⁶²

As to roughness, smoothness, heaviness, and lightness, these properties are in fact given definitions in *Timaeus* where they are defined entirely in terms involving bodies and their interactions upon each other. Thus, in the context of *Laws*, ‘the bodily’ is being used by Plato as a shorthand for the elemental bodies and their properties and those of the bodies made from the elemental ones. It does *not* refer to the underlying material substrata, e.g., the hot and cold, etc. And as to material length, breadth, depth, and strength, these things cannot be found within the substrates of contraries, but only in ordered unities which come to be from the imposition of them upon those substrates. Again, in *Timaeus*, the elemental bodies are brought into being only when the Demiurge expresses into the substrates various geometrical shapes thereby giving order and

⁶¹ *Laws* 892a-b.

⁶² *Laws* 896d.

measure to those substrates and bringing into being the elementary bodies, that is, geometrical bodies in space and time with sensible properties inherited from the substrates from which they are formed. On this point, Timaeus thus: ‘fire, earth, water, and air are bodies. Now everything that has bodily form also has depth. Depth, moreover, is of necessity comprehended within surface, and any surface bounded by straight lines is composed of triangles’ which may be mathematically decomposed into lines and angles. Thus, material length, breadth, depth are associated not with the substrates but with unified physical bodies formed from those substrates by the imposition of order upon them; the strength of these bodies is inherited from the underlying substrate, but perceptible only through a percipient body’s interaction with the elementary bodies, thus, only if the elementary bodies have been formed. It seems clear, then, that the argument in this section of *Laws* is not meant to be an argument for the priority of soul to matter in the inclusive sense of both the underlying contraries and the bodies formed out of them, but, rather, just the latter. Plato seems to be arguing not about whether the hot and cold, the wet and dry, etc., are in motion, but about whether they could form solids, i.e., elements, and whether these elements could form more complex bodies, without the intervention of the divine. The argument concludes that they cannot, but it does not show that the hot and cold, etc., cannot be in a kind of motion that is incapable of creating unity.

As we have seen, this leaves open the possibility for there being a form of motion in the underlying contraries if that motion is such as to be in no way capable of generating unified wholes. Is there any basis for supposing that Plato recognises the existence of such a kind of motion? In fact, the very same *Laws* passage leaves one with the impression that he might have done. When he introduces the division between motion capable of causing motion only in other things, and motion capable of causing motion both in itself and in other things, one wonders why Plato

mentions only these two. For there seems to be at least one other possibility perspicuous by its absence: motion which is capable of moving only itself and not anything else. This would be a most peculiar form of motion, if it existed, but there is certainly a logical space for it to fit within Plato's division on the basis of what a thing can move: itself and/or other things.

I suggest that this third kind of motion would be precisely the type of thing that cannot generate unity. If, as was argued, Plato allows that the hot and cold, wet and dry, etc. can be in motion as long as that motion cannot create unified things, then, I suggest that this third kind of motion would be that motion. At *Timaeus* 57d7-58a1 Timaeus gives a brief account of the conditions in which motion and rest 'come to be'. He says:

It is difficult, or rather impossible, for something to be moved without something to set it in motion, or something to set a thing in motion without something to be moved by it. When either is absent, there is no motion, but [when they are present] it is quite impossible for them to be uniform. And so let us always presume that rest is found in a state of uniformity and to attribute motion to non-uniformity (ἀνωμαλία). The latter, moreover, is caused by inequality...

The conditions which Timaeus lays out here for the possibility of motion and rest, that there be a thing set in motion and a thing to set it in motion, does not preclude the possibility that it is one and the same thing which sets and is set in motion. The soul itself, as a self-moving mover, would be one such thing. But what is especially important here is the fact that rest is found only in a state of uniformity, and 'motion (κίνησις)' is always to be attributed what is in a state of ἀνωμαλία, i.e., non-uniformity, irregularity, or unevenness ἀνωμαλία. Something in a state of unevenness has no share in equality, and, as we saw in the long quotation from *Timaeus* above, this is precisely how the receptacle is described, namely, uneven and irregular. In accordance with the brief analysis of

motion which Timaeus gives, he seems to attribute motion to the receptacle precisely because it is uneven. But in what sense is being in a state of irregularity responsible for being in a state of motion? What kind of motion is this? It is better, I think, to understand κίνησις here not as, say, locomotion or motion in space. Rather, it seems more reasonable to take this as meaning *change*. As we saw in *Laws*, the Athenian includes change as a kind of motion. Compare this with a few more passages. In the discussion in *Philebus*, Socrates gives Equality as a paradigmatic example of limit,⁶³ and says of things in the unlimited class that they are ‘always in flux and never remain’.⁶⁴ At *Timaeus* 32c1-4 the four elemental bodies, having been made by the Demiurge to be as perfect as they could be, ‘bestowed friendship upon it [the body of the cosmos]’. At *Republic* 352b-e Socrates says, ‘We have shown that just people are cleverer and more capable of doing things, while unjust ones aren’t even able to act together [...] for those who are all bad and completely unjust are completely incapable of accomplishing anything’. And again, at *Republic* 351d1-e, ‘Injustice, Thrasymachus, causes civil war, hatred, and fighting among [unjust people], while justice brings friendship and a sense of common purpose’.

Taking these passages together, we can see that Plato means to represent the unlimited in itself, that is, without limits imposed upon it, as being utterly uneven, and therefore always in flux, never remaining. And, since it is only by the Demiurge constructing and ordering the four elements that the body of the universe is given a share of friendship, and, hence, that whatever the body was prior to the Demiurge’s imposition of such order, it or whatever would be made into it had nothing of friendship in it. The body of the universe is from elements ordered well, but the elements themselves are created by the imposition of mathematical order upon the powers which are their traces in the primitive universe. What could these underlying powers be if not continua of contrary

⁶³ *Philebus* 25b.

⁶⁴ *Philebus* 24d2-5

opposites such as hot and cold, dense and rare, wet and dry, etc.? I suggest that is precisely what they are.⁶⁵ Finally, from the *Republic* passages we see that injustice is characterised by a lack of friendship, in-fighting, and the inability to coordinate in the accomplishment of a unified purpose. Assuming that the receptacle in *Timaeus* is the same as the Great and Small—the chief member of the unlimited class in *Philebus* which makes other things unlimited—then it is readily understandable why Plato describes both as being in flux and disorderly motion: prior to the imposition of any order or limit, which includes Equality, then the receptacle/Great and Small is in a disorderly state of flux which is the sort of motion/change associated with irregularity. Since the material substrata from which the elements are formed by the Demiurge are in a state of hostility, we may assume with the *Republic* passages that they are in a state of injustice and disorder which prevents them from being able to co-operate and work together to attain shared goals.

From all of this it seems clear that the type of change which the receptacle/Great and Small is said to undergo in *Philebus* and in *Timaeus* would be a type of motion utterly unable to produce anything unified, and, for as long as it was left without limit imposed upon it, would be forever changing itself and nothing else because it could not create anything else and certainly would not be able to affect the intelligible world. This would mean that the receptacle has a type of motion capable of changing itself and nothing else. But this is precisely the type of motion which we said logically possible within the discussion of *Laws* but not mentioned. We have seen, then, good reason to think that not only is it logically possible for such a motion to exist, but that Plato elsewhere gives much reason to think such motion exists in the form of the endless fluctuation of

⁶⁵ See, again, the *Laws* 891b-c passage above in which the Athenian lays out the materialist doctrine. As was argued there, the details of the doctrine, which involve the formation of elements out of the hot and cold, dry and wet, soft and hard, and other contrary properties is not what he objects to.

the receptacle/the Great and Small and everything in the unlimited class prior to the imposition of order. And that this motion is incapable of producing unity means that Plato's recognition of it is perfectly consistent with his argument for the prime-mover doctrine as interpreted above according to which motion capable of creating, organising, and governing the elemental bodies and things made from them requires soul, but that motion which is incapable of all of this could well exist without the causality of soul.

One might respond here with the question of why Plato does not make explicit mention of this in *Laws*, especially considering just how important the receptacle is in *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, and elsewhere. In reply to this it is sufficient, I think, to remember that the Athenian's interlocutors are not philosophers, that they would struggle even to grasp the proof for the priority of soul to unified bodily things and therefore must rely upon him to do so, and, most importantly, that the proof he gives there is to be a legal preamble for laws that is supposed to be accessible to all the citizens. Within these constraints it would be utterly inappropriate explicitly to introduce the existence and character of the receptacle, especially since his proof for the existence of god does not require it.⁶⁶ We have here, then, a way of harmonising prime-mover doctrine with the claim that the receptacle and its contents—the unlimited continua of contrary properties—is in disorderly motion. The receptacle and primitive universe is in disorderly motion in the sense that its motion is such as to be utterly incapable of generating even the most basic physical unities, the elemental bodies. For their generation it is necessary to have the intervention of soul and the intelligible world. For it is only by the imposition of order, and the provident guidance of the divine, that, according to Plato, such unities could come to be. In fact, it is in large part because, the receptacle is, as one might

⁶⁶ Recall that at *Timaeus* 49a the receptacle is 'difficult and vague' to express in words, and this is coming from an expert astronomer and accomplished philosopher in discussion with Socrates. There would be no hope for Clinias or Megillus, let alone an entire citizen-body, to understand the receptacle. That is most likely why Plato does not mention it.

say, change changing change, that the intervention of a divine being is necessary for the generation of unified material things.

Let us clarify a bit more the sort of change that the receptacle undergoes. It was argued above that a process of change or generation which does not occur for the sake of a particular being or being in general cannot really be said to be a *process* of change at all. For if a thing *a* changes without there being an end-point, that is, without there being something which *a* changes *into*, then each subsequent moment of existence for *a* is merely qualitatively or numerically distinct from each preceding moment and would never cease to do so unless it were annihilated completely. For if a thing is not changing *into* something, it is just changing, that is, it is fluctuating indefinitely by being merely qualitatively or numerically distinct from moment to moment for as long as it exists. The receptacle is indestructible, and, moreover, has no qualities in and of itself; that is what allows it to be so effective a receptacle forever.⁶⁷

If the receptacle is fluctuating but has no qualities to distinguish one phase from the next, then it cannot even be qualitatively distinguishing itself from itself. In other words, all that it is doing is *numerically* distinguishing itself from itself. This is a most perplexing thing. But, one way of understanding what this means is by its identification with the Great and Small. Aristotle indicates that the Great and Small form a continuum of infinite increase and infinite decrease in numerical quantity.⁶⁸ If the Great and Small is not associated with any qualitative traits in addition to the purely numerical, quantitative ones, then the change which it undergoes is purely numerical, that is, numerical differentiation: each 'part' of it is numerically distinguished from each other part

⁶⁷ *Timaeus* 49a1-52c1.

⁶⁸ See *Physics* 3, 203a15-20: 'Plato has two infinities, the Great and the Small', and 3, 206b25-30: 'Plato also made the infinities two number, because it is supposed to be possible to exceed all limits and to proceed *ad infinitum* in the direction both of increase and of reduction' (trans. W. D. Ross). Thus, the Great and (the) Small are a pair of contraries: infinite increase and infinite decrease in number. This is why anything with the Great and Small within them, i.e., anything in the unlimited class, is unlimited, because they are made to be able to increase and decrease infinitely.

of it in a never-ending fluctuation. And this lack of quality is what allows it to be forever available to receive images of Forms.

We need to ask how all of this works to explain the possibility of evil. Since Plato maintains that the receptacle is a necessary constituent of all sensible things generated by the imposition of limits upon it, something of the receptacle seems ‘to carry over’, as it were, into the generated within it. But it was argued above that the peculiar motion of the receptacle is a capacity to move or change itself but nothing else. How, then, can its motion affect anything, since surely this would be a change and thus contravene the necessity that its motion be inert with respect to other things? The solution is, I think, this: we must remember that it does not follow from the fact that the receptacle cannot change anything but itself that nothing but the receptacle can change *it* in the sense of imposing limits upon it. And that is exactly what the Demiurge does when he creates the elemental bodies from it: he imposes mathematical order upon it, thereby giving it order and measure and creating something from it. And as long as the order which the Demiurge or any craftsman has imposed upon the disorderly substratum remains, the substratum will itself remain ordered. At the ‘moment’ when the Demiurge imposes order upon the receptacle, since the receptacle is in its peculiar, timeless motion of infinite numerical distinction throughout every ‘part’ of itself, it would seem to be a moving target of sorts. This feature is what prevents the imposition of order upon it from being absolutely imperfect. Even at its best, it could only be a very near fit between order and receptacle because it is slippery, shifting substratum owing to its infinite variability.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ One might be put in mind here, of a potential issue with the idea that the receptacle is changing even though it is not in time. But it is changing in the sense of being an actual infinity of numerically distinct parts. It thus exists all at once and yet has a sort of timeless motion in the fact that every part of it differs from every other part. This unevenness is, according to Plato in *Timaeus*, sufficient for attributing some motion to a thing. This is, then, a sort of ontological motion: pure numerical differentiation between every point on an infinite continuum.

As we said, it is because each part of the receptacle is in itself merely numerically distinct from every other point which allows the receptacle to receive in principle any Forms when the conditions are right, when, that is, the real causes—the Forms and the intelligible world—employ the auxiliary causes in order to bring things about in the world. But it is also precisely because of this fact, that the receptacle is entirely devoid of stable character in itself, which makes it susceptible not only to *good* change, but to bad change. That is, when the conditions are right, the receptacle will take on various appearances. And insofar as these changes are the product of Intellect or, through his instruction, the World-Soul or the heavenly bodies and other spirits, these things will always be for the best.⁷⁰ But Plato evidently thinks that these beings do not have total control over everything in the world. In *Statesman* myth about the epochs governed by Kronos and by Zeus, we are said to be in the universe at the time of its being controlled by Zeus in which, unlike the universe in the time of Kronos, mortals and living beings are forced to provide and care for themselves.⁷¹ In the myth, when the divine steps away from the cosmos and leaves it to its own devices, it is corrupted over time. But before it is able to become so corrupt as to be completely destroyed, the divine steps back in and saves it.

I suggest that the point at which the divine steps back in represents the part of the cosmos over which, in the context of *Timaeus*, the Demiurge and those closest to him have direct control. That the Demiurge has direct control over certain fundamental things and that his control of these ensures their being as orderly and good as anything material can be, ensures that no matter how corrupted everything else in the universe becomes, the universe as a whole will never become so corrupt as to be destroyed because the Demiurge never relinquishes direct and providential control over those parts of the cosmos which, were they to become corrupted, would entail the entire

⁷⁰ See *Timaeus* 42d-e.

⁷¹ See *Statesman* 268d-275c for the myth.

destruction of the cosmos. As for everything else in the universe, namely, those things over which the Demiurge and his ilk do not take direct control—including particular individual souls and how they behave—the material substrata from which these things are formed are therefore susceptible to changes which are not directly controlled by the divine and therefore not necessarily for the best. In this way, because the areas of the receptacle making up, say, a particular human body, are susceptible to any change—as is any area of the receptacle—and because the Demiurge does not directly control what particular changes that area undergoes, when the conditions are right for certain *harmful* changes, those changes will occur because the receptacle accepts anything offered to it.

When, for example, a human being decides to act in such a way that will lead to disorder within his bodily constitution—to drink more than is moderate, say—the part of the receptacle that makes up his body puts up no resistance to this activity. Now, if the Demiurge had direct control over everything, the Demiurge could prevent humans from acting ways that will lead the body or the soul out of due measure, and, therefore the receptacle would not be led away from the order imposed by the Demiurge. Because the Demiurge does not take direct control over such things as our individual decisions, if the individual does not act appropriately, and if there are no external forces stopping him from acting, he will act and, if successful, the receptacle will change accordingly. The all-accepting character of the receptacle is thus a double-edged blade: on the one hand, its availability allows it to cooperate with being to generate anything which meets the necessary conditions for generation. On the other hand, precisely because it accepts anything which meets the necessary conditions, it puts up no resistance even when what comes to be in it is a bad thing, that is, something which does not fit what is in due measure.

The receptacle has this character, as we said, because of the fact that it is in the most peculiar form of motion, pure numerical differentiation between every part of itself such that it is in no way even, which is utterly incapable of, on its own, creating unified things, and which can be changed by other things but changes nothing but itself. It therefore accepts whatever from being is given to it. If it is given being that is different with respect to the being that should be there, then the relevant part of the receptacle which accepts the being that should not be there at that time or in that degree, etc., that is, in a way that is out of due measure, then the receptacle cooperates in bringing something bad into the world.

The only thing capable, then, of bringing anything into being in the sensible world, are the Demiurge himself, things directed by him Demiurge, or by individual souls. Only individual souls are capable of bringing the wrong thing into being at the wrong time, in the wrong degree, etc. Only individual souls are capable of bringing things into the world which are out of due measure. That they can be out of due measure is possible only because there is something in the world which accepts any being whatever: the receptacle. That a particular being does come into the world is going to be because of the causality of things directed by the Demiurge or individual souls. It is in this sense that, in *Laws*, Plato says that soul, though clearly not the divine soul which orders the universe, is ‘the cause of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, justice and injustice, and all the opposites’. Plato seems to mean individual souls, the souls of humans, animals, etc. But clearly he cannot mean that the soul determines what goodness and evilness are. These are facts determined by things and above the intelligible world.

What the individual soul *can* do is to actualise the potential for ugliness, evil, beauty, goodness, etc., to come into being. The individual soul cannot create the potential for these things to be in the world. For this potential is in the fact that the receptacle is forever available for change.

All that the individual soul does is to actualise its potential by causing the changes in various ways. But when the actions or inactions of individual souls brings the wrong part of being into the world, or too much, or too little, or at the wrong time, etc. they bring something into the world that is out of due measure. They bring, in other words, evil into the world. But the potential for the existence of evil in the world is accounted for by the character of the receptacle. Thus, the potential for evil in general coming into the world—that is, for something which is in itself good (being) but bad insofar as its being in the world in a way that is out of due measure—is explained by the peculiar, disorderly motion of the receptacle. The actuality of *particular* evils, however, is the responsibility of particular agents, moral and otherwise.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters we have seen that Plato's theory of evil thinks of evil *per se* as deviations from a mean determined by a relevant 'part' of Being, either by particular Forms, or by relationships to the intelligible more generally. A thing is therefore evil to the extent that it deviates from the mean to the extent that it fails to be or manifest the relevant being which it should. All things which come to be are *should* manifest certain parts of being in the sense that they come to be because being teleologically and constitutively determines the nature of that particular thing being generated. In this sense, a generated being comes to be for the sake of manifesting being as fully as possible. To the extent that it does this well, where to manifest being well is to have the right parts, in the right way, to the right extent, etc., to be in due measure, thereby possessing the truth, beauty, and order which things in this world get only by approximating their paradigms in the intelligible world. A thing is therefore good or evil to the extent that it fits or fails to fit the due measure set by the being which is its paradigm. And while there are in principle an unlimited

number of ways in which limit and unlimited can be mixed, due measure is precisely that mixture of limit and unlimited which generates the most true, beautiful, orderly, and therefore good, being within a given context.

As it turns out, then, Plato's theory of evil is an early version of the so-called 'privation theory' of evil which receives perhaps its most crystalised expression from Saint Thomas Aquinas but is, as we have seen, there in Plato.⁷² The Privation Theory of evil can be stated in a simple equation: evil is privation of the good. Privation is distinct from mere absence: it is a type of absence, namely, the absence of what *should* be present. The standard example of privation is that of an eye which lacks the power to enable a percipient to see.⁷³ An eye is an eye *because* it has this power; having it is what makes something an *eye* rather than, say, the part of a sculpture which merely looks like an eye. Hence, a particular eye that lacks this power is missing something which it should have given its identity as an eye. According to the privation theory of evil, then, since that particular eye is deprived of what, given its nature, it should in fact possess, the eye is defective or evil *as an eye*.⁷⁴ Plato's view differs from the views of other privation theorists not in the identification of evil with privation or deviation from what should be, but in his substantive views underlying this identification.

We have also seen how the receptacle exists in a most peculiar form of motion, a sort of timeless, endless, differentiation within itself which is utterly impotent for the generation of any substantial unity. The impotence of the receptacle is both a blessing and curse, as it were. For on the one hand the everlasting nature of the sensible world and its perfection as a complete image of

⁷² See Saint Aquinas, Saint Augustine, and even Aristotle fall within this tradition as well.

⁷³ See Aristotle's *Categories* 10.12a25-13b35.

⁷⁴ As Aristotle shrewdly points out (*Cat.* 10.12a30-35), the absence of vision in that which by its nature has no vision is not a *privation*. The absence of vision is only a privation in those things for which it is natural to have vision. That is why rocks are not blind though they cannot see. Cf. the famous Socratic dictum, ὁ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπων, 'the unexamined life is not worth living *for Mankind*'. The goodness of examination is explicitly indexed to a particular kind of creature, namely, to us.

the Living Animal requires that the material substrata from which sensible things are generated be forever receptive to the imposition of new limits, and, hence, for the generation of new appearances in space, i.e., sensible particulars. At the same time, however, that the receptacle receives into itself anything given to it, that is, will manifest whatever of being is imposed upon it, this means that it is forever capable of manifesting things good or evil. Now, since anything is good to the extent that it images being, any being generated in the world is, *qua* being, good to the extent that it fits the due measure determined by the relevant paradigms for the sake of which it comes to be in the sensible world in the first place. But it is nevertheless evil to the extent that it is not, within the relevant context, the which should be.

Say, for example, that a painter is creating a hyper-realistic painting of the Mediterranean Sea, and instead of blue paint for the water they use red paint. Within the context of generating a realistic image of something blue, red is the wrong colour paint to use. Its use constitutes an error on the part of the painter who is, to the extent that she has failed to do what she ought to have done within the context, a bad painter. The graver or more regular the errors, the worse the painter *qua* painter.⁷⁵ And yet, it is nevertheless the case that the red paint used is a something with being, something which, by participating in being, has some share of goodness, beauty, and truth. The evil involved in the use of red rather than blue consists precisely in the fact that blue *should have been used* in constructing something—the painting—which is supposed to represent something which is blue. The nature of the Mediterranean Sea dictates that images of it (at a certain time of day, year, depth, etc.) should be blue rather than red. An image of it that fails to represent it as it is is therefore a bad image of it.

⁷⁵ This example is, of course, a simplistic way of demonstrating the relationship between doing and being bad. It is unclear exactly what the relative weights are for, say, seriousness of error versus regularity of error over time, and how the interaction of these and other factors work together to determine, overall, how an agent is. Is a craftsman who continuously makes tiny errors worse than one makes only one error but an error very serious?

In the same way, even though any mixture will bring something into being, and even if the thing generated is as perfect a manifestation of *its* paradigm anything could be possible, it is nevertheless evil when considered in relation to what should have been brought into being within that context. Making red what should be blue is instantiating being, but it is instantiating the *wrong* being and is evil to that extent. Similarly, a disease in the body is not the introduction to the body of some dark entity called ‘evil’, or some positive metaphysical force. The evil of disease consists in the fact the body fails to fit the due measure for bodies. But this can be either because of the presence of something which should not be there, or the absence of something which should. These are the two ways in which a thing can fail to be out of proportion, and so the two ways for a thing to suffer evil. But just because a being may be present, as in the first alternative, does not mean that the being is evil *qua* evil, as we have said.

One question to consider here, perhaps the most pressing of all, is this: how does this way of understanding evil help us to understand immorality or vice? How does the doctrine of evil as divergence from the mean explain why, for example, Socrates’ escaping from prison would be unjust? And what, moreover, is the mean from which evil humans diverge? At *Republic* 332d-e, Socrates says that the just man ‘from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious’. Later, Socrates says, ‘it seems to me that there is one form of virtue and an unlimited number of forms of vice’. Comparing these passages with each other, and especially with the foregoing account of the evil as deviation from the mean, and goodness as achievement of the mean, it seems clear that, generally speaking, all of vice is deviation from the mean. The just person is the one who can be as unified and orderly as can be. The aim of *Republic* is to show that justice in the soul, and in the city, means being in the best possible order for a city or soul to be in. For humans this means embracing reason as the natural master of every other part of oneself

and doing nothing but what is best as this is determined by reason. To be unjust is to fail to live in this way. More concretely, this means to fail to live with reason as one's one and only guide to action. Even more specifically, this means that one allows the other parts of one's soul to determine what one desires and how one acts. There is an infinite number of vices because there is an infinite number of ways to fail to be in due proportion, that is, to be virtuous.

Vice, then, is also deviation from the mean. But what is the mean for humans? The answer is divine intellect. In *Timaeus* we are told that whereas the gods created by the Demiurge were assigned the task of creating 'the mortal kind of soul', namely, the part of the soul that has appetites for food and drink,⁷⁶ and the part which is spirited,⁷⁷ the Demiurge himself created 'the immortal origin of soul', which his progeny 'proceeded to encase within a round mortal body, and give it the entire body as its vehicle'.⁷⁸ The immortal origin of our soul is earlier called 'something described as divine and ruling within those of them [us] who always consent to follow after justice and after you [the secondary gods], I shall begin by sowing that seed, and then hand it over to you'.⁷⁹ The immortal seed is the immortal origin of the mortal kind of soul; it is that in us which naturally ought to rule, and which, in the just person, is described as actually ruling because to be just is to let it rule completely. This divine part is the intellect, and it is created by the Demiurge himself. It is immortal, as he is, and, given that *he* is an intellect, is capable of all the intellectual capacities he has, albeit, presumably, to a lesser degree. That is why the intellect is called the divine part of us.

At *Laws* 716c-d, the Athenian thus: 'If you want to recommend yourself to someone of this character [God's], you must do your level best to make your own character reflect his, and on this

⁷⁶ *Timaeus* 70e-71a.

⁷⁷ *Timaeus* 70a-b.

⁷⁸ *Timaeus* 69c-d.

⁷⁹ *Timaeus* 41c-d.

principle the moderate man is God's friend, being like him, whereas the immoderate and unjust man is not like him and is his enemy; and the same reasoning applies to the other vices too'. At *Theaetetus* 176a-b: 'a man should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven; and escape means becoming as like God as possible; and a man becomes like God when he becomes just and pious, with understanding'.

Putting all of these passages together, the just person is the one who has most fully attained the one form of virtue, and thereby become a unified whole out of many, attaining harmony and moderation. She does this by embracing reason above all else, and letting it rule over everything she does. This is the same part which the Demiurge, and which is divine and like him: namely, the intellect. The one who is most like God is the truly virtuous person, the person who is as just and pious with understanding as it is possible for one to be. It follows that the person in whom intellect rules as perfectly as completely as possible over everything one does is the person most like God. It is only by embracing the rule and authority of our immortal intellects, that one can become virtuous, and it is only by becoming virtuous that one can become like God. Since being virtuous means attaining due measure—that, after all, is what makes the just person just—and it is only by attaining due measure that one is good, and since attaining virtue is becoming like God, then it seems abundantly clear that given our divine lineage, likeness to God by embracing the rule of intellect over all, is due measure for all persons. Thus, likeness to God is the measure against which good and bad persons *qua* persons are judged.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ *Theaetetus* 176e-177a: 'The man who is most like [God] is the man who has become as just as it lies in human nature to be. And it is here that we see whether a man is truly able, or truly a weakling and a nonentity; for it is the realization of this that is genuine wisdom and goodness, while the failure to realise it is manifest folly and wickedness'. The failure to identify likeness to God as due measure for persons to aim at is folly and because this brings with it the failure to be like God. One can only *truly* be like God by being just and pious *with wisdom*, which must include wisdom of God as the being which determines due measure for mankind.

To complete this picture, we need only that that actions are good or bad according to whether they improve, maintain, or come from, the goodness of something that is in due measure. On the other hand, an action is evil to the extent that it disrupts or degrades something by forcing it out of, or farther away from, being in due measure.⁸¹ But it makes no difference whether one wrongs oneself by acting in a way that does not directly harm others, thereby forcing only oneself away from due measure, or whether one harms others by acting in such a way that forces them from the mean. In every case, evil is difference from the mean. Actions are evil which cause difference from the mean. Thus, every form of vice, and every other particular evil, is evil to the extent that it is, or causes, the lack of due measure.

⁸¹ *Crito* 49c-d, Socrates says, 'Doing harm to people is no different from wrongdoing'. By implication, benefiting people is no different from doing right. To harm is, for Plato, just to make them worse, i.e., to drag them away from the mean. To benefit is to make someone better, i.e., draw them closer to the mean.

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