

## PLATO'S "EARLIER THEORY OF FORMS"

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R. E. ALLEN'S *Plato's Euthyphro and the Earlier Theory of Forms* (London 1970) has the considerable merit of compelling us to think again about a number of problems we usually supposed had been solved. Allen argues that in the so-called early group of dialogues—those preceding the *Symposium* and the *Phaedo*—a theory is presented which differs substantially from the two-world theory presented in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. The present investigation will suggest that Allen's introduction of an "earlier" Theory of Forms is likely to mislead, and that much more work needs to be done on the early dialogues if we are to understand the crucial opening stages of Plato's philosophical career. Work of this kind will be impeded by the wholesale importation of loaded technical terms: hence I shall generally avoid translating words such as *eidos* and *idea* as Form, and refrain from speaking of Plato's Theory of Forms until after some discussion of the relevant material. In one important respect, however, I shall follow Allen against a number of recent interpreters: I shall not attempt to interpret the early dialogues with the help of Aristotle's views of Plato or of Socrates. It is at least as likely that we can understand Aristotle's comments after precise examination of the dialogues as the other way around.

The question of the order of the dialogues lies beneath the surface. I am obliged to treat them in sequence, and any sequence I pick suggests that this is the correct chronological sequence. Certainly I am prepared to intuit (and defend elsewhere) that the *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Major*,<sup>1</sup> and *Hippias Minor* are all earlier than the *Protagoras*, and that the *Protagoras* is earlier than the *Gorgias*, *Meno*, and *Cratylus*; and some of the reasons for these views will become apparent. But whether the *Laches* was written earlier than, simultaneously with, or later than the *Euthyphro*, no one will ever know; nor does it matter for my present purposes. In general, therefore, I shall mention chronology only in passing, and I hope that the interpretations I present will be acceptable to those who differ sharply about the sequence of dialogues within the early group.

### DIALOGUES EARLIER THAN THE *Protagoras*

#### a) The *Euthyphro*

Allen's instinct was sound in regarding the *Euthyphro* as a possible base for constructing "an earlier Theory of Forms," for it is probably the

<sup>1</sup>If genuine, as I believe. See G. M. A. Grube, "On the Authenticity of the *Hippias*

best base available for such an undertaking. Ross at least would have agreed with the choice and gives us a lead into our own examination. "It seems probable," he says,<sup>2</sup> "that the *Euthyphro* is the first dialogue in which either of the words *idéa* and *éidos* appears in its special Platonic sense." He then, like Allen, introduces the terms to us in English as equivalent to "Form." Let us, therefore, start with the *Euthyphro*, where the problem is posed as follows (5d7): "Tell me then, what do you say 'the holy' and 'the unholy' are?" Euthyphro is apparently misled by the form of the question. He thinks that Socrates wants to know what acts can be labelled "holy" or "unholy." He gives examples of such acts. In a sense he cannot be blamed for his answer; after all, Socrates had asked whether "what is holy" is the same with itself (*ταὐτόν ... αὐτῷ*) in every act (*πρᾶξις*, 5d2). It at least appears that Socrates is interested in acts, in things done. Socrates has in fact asked whether such acts all "have some one *idea*." Anything that is going to be called "holy" will have this. Absolutely nothing is said at this stage to explain what this *idea* is. And we must leave this open for the time being. In general two major interpretations have been offered: *idea* is either the essence (in some sense) or a distinguishing mark.

Socrates soon tells Euthyphro that when he inquired about what "the holy" is, he did not merely want an example of something which could be called holy (6d1). He therefore expands his question, but changes his vocabulary. He says he wants to know the *eidos* (presumably = *idea*) "by" which all that is holy is holy. The dative "by which" is ambiguous. But at least Socrates must mean that we can tell by some quality in holy things that they are holy. That is, of course, the quality of "the holy." Socrates then adds that it has been admitted that "by" one *idea* holy things are holy and unholy unholy. Can you tell me, he wonders, what this *idea* is, so that when I recognize it, I can use it as a standard (*παράδειγμα*) and say whether particular acts are holy or unholy? In other words, if we know what the *idea* is, we are able to apply the terms "holy" and "unholy" correctly to actions. What exactly is the model here? Perhaps Socrates is saying that just as when we know that *x* is a knife, we can tell whether *y* and *z* are knives, so if we know that *a* is holy, we can tell whether *b* and *c* are holy. Now in Aristotelian terminology knives are substances and "holy" is the name of a quality. It would follow that you could pick up a knife and say "Knives are like that," but obviously "the holy" cannot be exhibited in *exactly* the same way, even if it does admit of some kind of ostensive definition. And when Euthyphro tries to exhibit the holy in a different way, by saying, "It's what I'm now doing . . . That is holy," Socrates is not satisfied. Pre-

*Major*," CQ 20 (1926) 134-148; "The Logic and Language of the *Hippias Major*," CQ 24 (1929) 369-375.

<sup>2</sup>W. D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford 1953) 12.

sumably he thinks that by inspecting Euthyphro's action in prosecuting his father, we could not find *why* he claimed it as holy, for although Euthyphro has called it "holy," he has not shown what it means to be holy. The answer to the why-question can apparently be reached only by an act of comparison. When two actions which are holy are compared, we can then see what they have in common. We can identify what we should call a "feature" or "characteristic"—that is, what Plato calls an *eidos* or an *idea*.<sup>3</sup>

If the word "standard" (*παράδειγμα*) refers not to a Form but to a feature or characteristic, we can make progress on the suggestion that "the holy" is that "by which holy acts are holy." All this means so far in the *Euthyphro* is that when actions exhibit a particular feature, they can be called "holy." We are told nothing whatsoever up to this point about the ontological status of this feature, nor do we have any reason to assert that Plato has even considered the question of ontological status. He has merely tried to show us how it is that we are able to identify certain acts as holy: we do it by looking to see if they have a common feature.

At this point in the discussion Euthyphro proposes that what is dear to the gods is holy, that what is not is unholy; i.e., he proposes that "dearness to God" is the feature we are looking for. We need not pursue the complexities of the argument that follows, but we should notice that at 7a6 Socrates speaks not only of "that which is dear to the gods"—by which phrase, if the earlier discussion is a guide, he refers to acts—but also of the man who is dear to the gods. So he may be implying that if we know the action which is holy, we can recognize the holy man. Nevertheless it is important that we are not invited to think first about holiness as a disposition; but to consider "the holy" as a quality of specific acts. In the ensuing discussion it is somewhat unclear what the "things which are just and unjust, noble and base, good and bad" (7e2-3) are—perhaps they include people as well as acts—but that the emphasis is still on action is reaffirmed at 8e6: "When the gods differ among themselves about an act, some say it was done justly, others unjustly."<sup>4</sup>

So far it is the features of "the holy" and "the unholy" that we are looking for. Neither Socrates nor Euthyphro has begun to talk about

<sup>3</sup>The point is made by R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford 1948) 55. There would be no need to argue it again were it not denied by Allen (77). Allen's argument seems to be merely that no Greekequivalent of "distinguishing mark" appears in the text. He claims that the *Idea* is a standard for determining what things are holy—which may be all right, though Plato says "say" not "determine." But he then gratuitously adds that this standard "which is holiness itself, must state its *οὐσία*, its nature and reality." But there has been no mention of *οὐσία* (whatever that may mean in a particular context) up to this point in the *Euthyphro*.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. *πρᾶξις* again at 9b2.

"holiness" or "unholiness" (δσιότης, ἀνοσιότης). The question at issue seems consistently to be best formulated as "How do we meaningfully apply the predicate 'holy' to actions? What feature of actions is it to which we give this name?" That more than this is at stake is sometimes suggested by modern critics by the use of phrases like "defining holiness," "a definition of holiness," etc. It is widely assumed that it is a definition we are looking for,<sup>5</sup> and then interpreters begin to argue whether it is a real definition (in terms of genus and differentia) or a nominal definition. But we should not allow ourselves the privilege of interpreting the *Euthyphro* out of other dialogues. Perhaps in other early dialogues Plato is looking for definitions (of some sort): it does not follow that that is what he is doing here. What does Plato say when the word that suggests definition actually appears (9d2)? "Let us correct this point in the account (ἐν τῷ λόγῳ—this word need not be translated "definition") . . . Do you wish this to be demarcated in this way in the case of the holy and the unholy?" (i.e., such that what all the gods love is holy, and what they all hate is unholy). The crucial concept is in the word ὁρίσθαι: its meaning is rooted in the term ὄρος (boundary). When first used in our passage of the *Euthyphro* it does not introduce a new procedure, but sums up what has been happening up to this point. It should therefore be interpreted in the context of the discussion; and, as we have seen, the context is that Socrates and Euthyphro are looking for a feature or characteristic which will enable them to identify "the holy." Notice the exact wording of the Greek: not, "Do you wish the holy and the unholy to be demarcated (defined?) in this way?" but, "Do you wish it to be marked out in this way in the case of the holy and the unholy?" Markers are to be put up so that the holy and the unholy shall be recognized and separated from one another. This is neither to define the word "holy" nor to give a real definition of holiness. A statement is made (i.e., that the holy is what all gods love), which is in fact a hypothesis about the holy (τοῦτο ὑποθέμενος, 9d8) and represents a belief. If the statement is true, and the belief well-grounded, we can use our knowledge to spot a holy act when we see one.

The argument proceeds. Euthyphro fails to get to grips with the problem of whether the holy is holy because the gods love it or whether the gods love it because it is holy. Socrates identifies (or claims to identify) the source of the trouble. Although Euthyphro was asked what the holy is (τὸ ὅσιον, ὃ τι ποτ' ἔστιν), he is unwilling to exhibit its *ousia* but mentions something that happens to it (πάθος), i.e., that it is loved by the gods (11a7–9). He has not said what it is (ὅτι δὲ ὄν, 11b1). The contrast between *ousia* and *pathos* is new—and should not be commented on as though Socrates were Aristotle. We are not told much about *ousia*, though the

<sup>5</sup>For Socrates' supposed search for a definition in the *Euthyphro* see, e.g., Allen 79, W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* 3 (Cambridge 1969) 441.

*ousia* of the holy seems to be what the holy is. This is vague and presumably meant to be so. *Ousia* is contrasted with *pathos*, and a *pathos* is something that happens to something. All Socrates appears to be saying is that it is not necessarily very informative about the nature of  $x$  to point out that  $x$  is *F*. After all, we might say that all the gods love pork, but this knowledge alone does not help us if we want to know what a pig is. Certainly all the gods might love both pork and the holy, but there is no hope along these lines of determining the distinguishing mark of the holy. Of course, Euthyphro might have replied, "Ah, but it is the love of the gods that makes the holy holy." But even if true, this is inadequate. For the love of the gods might produce other results as well as holiness. And how could these results be distinguished? What would the distinguishing mark of the holy be?

So we get precious little out of the *Euthyphro* about *ousia*. You cannot identify the *ousia* of  $x$  by saying what happens to  $x$ . It seems to be merely two forms of the same question to ask: What is  $x$ ?, and, What is the *ousia* of  $x$ ? But as Socrates explicates it for us, whereas it might make sense to say "Something loved by the gods" as an answer to the question "What is  $x$ ?" it would be silly to give such an answer to the question when put in the form "What is the *ousia* of  $x$ ?" This form of the question simply serves to rule out one type of answer to "What is  $x$ ?"

In the last part of the *Euthyphro* (from 11e7) an attempt is made to pin down the holy by relating it to the just. It is agreed that the holy is a part (*μέρος*) of the just (12d5, 12e1, etc.) in the sense that everything that is holy is also just, while not everything that is just is also holy<sup>6</sup>—but there is no claim that we are now looking for a definition rather than a means of identification, and *a fortiori* no claim that definition by genus and differentia is the only way to reach a real definition. Little new is added in this section, except that the word "holiness" (*δσιότης*) is substituted for "the holy" at 13b4 (cf. 13c6). The shift is natural in Greek, and clearly no new metaphysical departure is intended. "Holiness" has become the name of the feature which things which are holy possess. But not a word is said about its ontological status. What does appear to be new, however, is that the description of the holy as a part of the just, and especially as that part which is the art of attending to the gods, has shifted the emphasis from holy acts to holy people. We are now talking about

<sup>6</sup>It would probably follow from this that Socrates would say that the holy is just. But "just" would be a Pauline predicate (see G. Vlastos, "The Unity of the Virtues in the *Protagoras*," *Review of Metaphysics* 25 [1972] 415–458). For "The holy is just" is merely a shorthand way of saying that everything of which "holy" can be predicated will also admit the predicate "just." It tells us nothing about the ontological status of "the holy," nor does it imply that there is anything which can be called "the holy" to which any kind of epithet can be applied in any other than the Pauline sense.

holiness as something with a purpose, that is, of benefitting the gods, and as an art. The existence of an art is best demonstrated by the existence of people who can perform that art. So Euthyphro now finds himself talking about those who know how to say and do what is pleasing to the gods (14b2 ff.). The discussion has tended to become dispositional; we are looking for a certain kind of individual. The holy acts of such people "save" individual families and cities.

The terminological problem gets still more confused. At 14c5 Socrates points out that we still want to know what the holy and holiness (*ἁγιότης*) are. Are they, he asks, a kind of knowledge of sacrificing and praying? So now the ambiguity is complete. Perhaps Socrates means that if this account is correct, then "holiness" is the term for the disposition of the man who has the knowledge, and "the holy" is the name of the act he performs—but this is only speculation. At any rate the uncertainty persists: we find holiness (14e7) and the holy (15b1 and b4). But we are near the end of the dialogue. Euthyphro's account (*λόγος*—there is no justification for the translation "definition") has come back to familiar ground—and if it is correct, then some previous admissions were improper. We must start again, says Socrates, and inquire what is the holy (15c11–12), for since you are prosecuting your father for murder, you must know what is holy and unholy (15d4–5). When Euthyphro makes his excuses and runs, Socrates again observes that he is so sorry that he will not have the opportunity to learn what things (actions) are holy and what are not.

What then does the *Euthyphro* offer us in our present inquiry?

1. A search for things (normally actions) which are properly called holy.
2. A hope that such actions can be identified by a single distinguishing feature (*εἶδος, ἰδέα*).
3. A use of the dative case (Holy actions are holy *by* the holy) which indicates the presence of this distinguishing mark. Hence we might almost say that holy actions are holy *because* they exhibit this feature.
4. We can determine whether action *x* is holy by seeing whether it exhibits the distinguishing mark or feature which holy things exhibit. This feature serves as our standard.
5. Apparently Socrates and Euthyphro think that the term "holy" applies most naturally to acts, and only by extension to people. Those who do what is holy are holy.
6. An effect of (5) is that, although a possible view that holiness is a disposition may be said to appear at one point in the discussion, it is not prominent.
7. Socrates and Euthyphro talk readily of "the holy," only towards the end of "holiness." Distinctions between the two—if any—are only latent.
8. When the holy is made the subject of a sentence, as in "The holy is

not always just," the predication is Pauline; i.e., Socrates means that it is not true that all holy things are also just things.

That is all we can get from the *Euthyphro* which relates to the origin of the Theory of Forms: no ontology, no doctrine of essence, no clear notion of definition.

#### b) The *Charmides*

This dialogue provides us with only scanty material, but we should notice that when temperance (*σωφροσύνη*) is first mentioned apparently casually at 157a6, it is said to be something which comes into being in our souls (*ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἐγγίγνεσθαι*). As in the *Euthyphro*, where Socrates is speaking of people who possess a characteristic, the abstract noun, not the neuter adjective (*τὸ σῶφρον*) is used. A coincidence perhaps—but it recurs. Charmides is said to excel in temperance (157d2–3).<sup>7</sup> And when they get round to the "What is it?" question, they do not ask "What is the temperate?" but "What is temperance and what kind of thing is it?" (159a2).

Charmides' first reply to the "What is it?" question is also of interest. Temperance, he suggests, is doing everything in a quiet and orderly fashion (or, in a word, quietness). The emphasis is again on *how* you act, not only (as usually in the *Euthyphro*) on what you do; but perhaps this is only because temperance is a different kind of virtue from holiness. "Holiness" (or rather "the holy") might naturally suggest performance alone—perhaps because of the ritualistic and legalistic emphasis in Greek religion.

Socrates' first reaction to "Temperance is quietness" again brings up Pauline predication. They say, he comments, that quiet people are temperate (159b7–8). But at 159b11 interpretation is more difficult. Socrates asks, "Is temperance a fine thing?" He presumably means that when people behave temperately they are behaving well—but it is not clear that there is no more to be squeezed out.

The next point that should be noticed is at 162e ff.: Charmides suggests that temperance makes people feel shame. "Makes"—in Greek *ποιεῖν*, *ἀπεργάζεσθαι*—looks promising. But we must not be deceived—was Plato?—by idiom. If I say in Greek that temperance makes me feel shame, I only mean that I feel shame *by* temperance or through the presence of the quality or characteristic of temperance.

Finally we come to Critias' explanation. Charmides remembers it at 161b6: temperance is "doing your own business." If we think of the *Republic*, we might suppose that an attitude or disposition is in question, for when Socrates tries to interpret it in another sense (emphasizing doing

<sup>7</sup>Cf. 158b2, 158c3, 159a1 (*εἰ σοι πάρεστι σωφροσύνη*, cf. 160d).

a specific and assigned job and suggesting that for a doctor healing the sick is temperance) we are brought to an impasse. But after a while Critias explains himself further. By "one's own business," he means the doing or achieving of good things (163e1). There is no explanation of what good things are—but clearly Critias is making the sort of assumptions that the *Euthyphro* makes. Certain *acts* are recognizably good. Critias thinks (naturally) that a man is temperate who does what he ought (164b3), but we get little further help on what this should be in the long discussion about self-knowledge and knowledge of knowledge which follows.

Problems about whether or in what sense temperance is being defined obviously lie beneath the surface of the *Charmides*, as similar problems underlie that of the *Euthyphro*. Consider 173a9: "Suppose that temperance, being such as we now mark it off . . ." The problem is in the word *ὀρίζομεθα*. Is a definition being sought? Have Socrates, Charmides, and Critias been looking for a definition? Certainly they have been asking what temperance is, and attempting to identify the temperate man. But again the text has given us no clue as to whether a means of identification is being sought, or something more formal. Even the *οὐσία-πάθος* distinction of the *Euthyphro* is missing. The very furthest we can go is to say that the "What is it?" question might lead towards a search for a definition. But the Greek does not compel us to talk of a definition of temperance. A likely hypothesis—of a sort that is commonly helpful in Greek Philosophy—is that the formal notion of definition (real or nominal) is not clearly in the writer's mind. Plato is going through a process which, when it becomes self-conscious, but not yet in the *Charmides*, will be said to imply an ultimate search for definition. *ὀρίζομεθα* is still ambiguous.

The dialogue ends with a discussion of the attempt to assimilate temperance to knowledge of good and evil, but again no notion appears of what this good and evil are. If we compare and contrast the *Charmides* with the *Euthyphro*, we notice the following:

1. Emphasis is rather more on character than on action.
2. "Temperance is F" (where F is an attribute) is to be interpreted as, "Those who are temperate are F."
3. We hear of knowing how to do what is good or bad, but have no statement as to how we can determine what is good or bad.
4. It is still not clear that a real or nominal definition is being sought.
5. The terms *εἶδος* and *ἰδέα* are absent from the discussion.

### c) The *Laches*

A few of the now familiar positions recur in the *Laches*. Virtue, we learn at 190b4-5, is something which may come to exist (*παραγενομένη*)



in the soul; we therefore need to know what it is. The vague form of this general inquiry should now be familiar. And the inquiry is soon narrowed to even more familiar territory. Instead of concerning ourselves with the whole of virtue, we shall deal with only a part of it (190c9),<sup>8</sup> namely courage (*ἀνδρεία*). We notice that the inquiry (comparable with that of the *Charmides*) is about a quality of the soul—and that the abstract noun is used. Laches gives the standard “wrong” answer. A brave man is said to be one who stands his ground. If he does F-type deeds, he is an F-type person. This attitude brings us back to Euthyphro.

Socrates’ reaction is also familiar. He indicates other kinds of courageous behaviour and wants to know what all the instances of courage have in common. What is this courage (*ἀνδρεία*) which is the same in all these people (191e10–11)?, he asks.<sup>9</sup> Again there is no reason to assert that he is looking for a strict definition; what he wants to do is identify courage when he sees it. Whether this may lead to a real or other definition of courage is a matter for us to judge; Socrates and Laches have not prejudged it at this point. Indeed when Laches wishes to understand further what Socrates is after, Socrates gives him an example of what he means: he describes quickness as the faculty or power of achieving a lot in a short time. Laches sees the point and offers his own account of courage: it is, he says, some sort of endurance of the soul (192b9). That is a feature of courageous behaviour. Socrates, of course, has little difficulty with this: not all endurance is courage. In other words one cannot simply identify endurance with courage. Laches is perplexed: he thinks that he is aware what courage is, but cannot quite grasp it (194b2–3), so Nicias butts into the argument.

The familiar problem of *ορίζομεθα* comes up immediately. You are not “marking off” courage correctly, says Nicias (194c8). That Nicias is not thinking of definition by genus and differentia when he uses this word is clear from his own description of courage, or rather the description which he says he has heard: courage is knowledge of what is to be recoiled from and what is to be faced (*τὴν τῶν δεινῶν καὶ θαρραλέων ἐπιστήμην*) both in war and elsewhere. I am not saying, of course, that such a description of courage does not imply the possibility of definition by genus and differentia. What I am saying is that in their dramatic context Nicias’ words seem to indicate no awareness of that possibility. And in any case the description is formally rejected in the *Laches*. What can be said about Nicias’ view is that he, like Laches, wants to understand what a courageous man is, rather than in the first instance what is a courageous act. It is

<sup>8</sup>Cf. 198a2.

<sup>9</sup>I translate *ἐν πᾶσι τοῦτοις* as “in all these people”—masculine rather than neuter—because when Socrates goes on to explain himself he speaks of courage as a power or ability (*δύναμις*) in the soul (192b).

in the character or at least in the mind of men that moral value can be identified. The point is important in one particular respect: if courage is knowledge (or some kind of knowledge), then animals cannot possess it (197a).

d) *Hippias Major*

At 286c5 Socrates comments that he was praising things as beautiful and blaming others as ugly when somebody brusquely asked him how he knew what things are beautiful and ugly. Could you tell me what the beautiful is?, the man inquired. The question, with the use of the neuter, reminds us of the *Euthyphro*. But a little later (287c1 ff.) the terminology is slightly different. It is suggested that "by justice" (dative) the just are just and by wisdom the wise are wise. We notice that, as elsewhere when we are talking about the qualities of men rather than actions, the abstract noun (justice, wisdom) is used. (It is then agreed that justice and wisdom "are something," which seems to mean that they exist in some form.) But when we shift to "good things," Plato writes that they are good by "the good" and that beautiful things are beautiful "by the beautiful." And of course the beautiful and the good "are something" too. So the question recurs, What is the beautiful? Does that mean, asks Hippias, What is beautiful?; and the reply suggests that the questions "What is beautiful?" and "What is the beautiful?" are not identical. The Greek is of interest: we want to know, not "What is beautiful?" (*τί ἐστι καλόν;*) but what the beautiful is (or [implausibly] what exists as the beautiful—*ὅτι ἐστὶ τὸ καλόν*). Hippias still misses the point in observing that a beautiful girl is beautiful, thus merely giving an example. Socrates tries to help him out, taking on the guise of the "obnoxious" enquirer, who presumably in any case represents himself: Are all these things which you say are beautiful beautiful if the beautiful itself is something (= exists)? And the reply is that if the girl is beautiful, there is something "because of" (*διὰ*) which things like her are beautiful. Here the *διὰ* + accusative (because of) is the equivalent of the earlier dative, but the novelty is that the characteristic "the beautiful" is referred to as "the beautiful itself." The phrase clearly reminds us of the phrases "*idea* of the holy," "*eidos* of the holy," in the *Euthyphro*, but, as in the *Euthyphro*, we know nothing of the status of this "beautiful." The translation of *αὐτό* as "absolute" has no warranty. What Plato is doing is no more than using the word to distinguish the quality "beautiful" from its instantiations in things which are beautiful. He wants to think of the beautiful *qua* beautiful and not of anything else which may be beautiful but also possesses other characteristics. He wants to know what grounds we have for applying the term "beautiful" to particulars and whether we can understand "the beautiful" in such a way as to provide some justification for doing this.

The only other point of importance for us is that the discussion brings out that the word "beautiful" is relative: some things are more beautiful than others (289c). And if beautiful in some respect, so ugly in some respect—but "the beautiful itself" cannot be both beautiful and ugly. What is the beautiful itself?<sup>10</sup> It is that by the addition of which as a characteristic (*εἶδος*, 289d4)<sup>11</sup> things become beautiful. And it will never appear ugly anywhere to anyone (291d2–3). Perhaps it is "the appropriate" (293e4).

There is interest in the passage beginning at 299d2. Do pleasant things differ by being pleasant? asks Socrates. Admittedly something may differ by being greater or smaller or more or less, but does it differ *qua* pleasant? The answer is no. And similarly with the beautiful. Two beautiful things have something in common which "makes" them beautiful. Both of them have it, individually and jointly.

In the ensuing discussion there is another echo of the *Euthyphro*, but nothing can be made of it. We hear of the *ousia* and the *pathos* (301b8), but it is not even clear that they are distinguished. At any rate no new light is shed on these terms. It is said (302c5) that two beautiful things are beautiful by a common *ousia*, a common feature present in them both. But *ousia* merely stands for "the beautiful" in this case. There is something real in common between beautiful things.

The dialogue ends in failure. We still do not know what the beautiful is (304e2). In summing it up, we are obviously bedevilled by uneasiness that it may not be an authentically Platonic piece. But if we leave these fears aside we notice the following:

1. A recurrence of the technical dative ("By wisdom the wise are wise") and the appearance of *διά* plus the accusative in a similar sense.
2. A clear assertion of the relativity of terms like "beautiful."
3. The use of *αὐτὸ τὸ* to designate the quality itself. Yet there is still no indication of how this quality (which certainly exists) is conceived by Socrates.

#### e) *Hippias Minor*

There is only one passage in this dialogue which need be cited. At 375d8 ff. Socrates asks whether justice is not either some sort of power (cf. *Laches* 192d5), or knowledge, or both. The abstract noun "justice" appears in the text, and it refers vaguely to something "in" the man who is just.

#### f) *Euthydemus*

We need only look at 300e–301a.

<sup>10</sup>The word *καλλος* is used at 292d3.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. 298b4. For "addition" cf. 292d1.

"Have you ever seen a beautiful thing, Socrates?"

"Yes, many of them."

"Are they different from the beautiful, or the same as the beautiful?" . . .

"I said that they are different from the beautiful itself (αὐτοῦ τοῦ καλοῦ) but that each of them had some beauty (κάλλος) present with it."

The ideas here parallel some of those in the *Hippias Major*. Instead of the quality being added to the substance, it is present with the substance—but the difference is presumably verbal. The phrase "the beautiful itself" recurs in a similar limited way. The beautiful is distinguished from things which are beautiful, though the relativity of the latter is not mentioned.

All the dialogues we have considered thus far may be taken together, but even if we treat them in this way, we find only the most tentative discussion of "qualities." It is possible, we learn, to think about justice, holiness, beauty, etc. as distinct from acts or persons who instantiate them, and these qualities have a genuine existence; they are assumed to be more than concepts. But when we ask what they are, we seem to be looking constantly for a means of identification, not for a definition. Phrases like *eidos*, *idea*, and αὐτὸ τὸ are already there, but the two former merely mean "identifying mark," and the latter is a formula designed to enable us to think about qualities rather than possessors of quality. In so far as qualities are self-predicative, the predication would have to be "Pauline." In one dialogue (if it is Platonic) the relativity of terms like "beautiful" is pointed out. And there is a strong tendency to use the abstract noun (justice, temperance) to refer to moral dispositions or virtues, the neuter adjective (the holy) to action.

#### FROM THE *Protagoras* TO THE *Symposium*

##### a) The *Protagoras*

The *Protagoras* is a crucial dialogue and the sections most important to us have received a good deal of attention recently.<sup>12</sup> I shall only concentrate on the parts of the dialogue which deal with the questions that have already arisen in this paper. In 329c Socrates reminds Protagoras that he has regularly spoken of justice (δικαιοσύνη), temperance, holiness, and the rest as one thing, i.e., virtue. He wants to know whether these qualities (and he is thinking apparently only of the moral qualities of persons, not the nature of actions) are parts (μέρη) of virtue (we have met this idea already), or whether "justice" etc. are different names for a single quality, i.e., virtue. In the discussion which follows, Socrates asks at 330a whether each virtue has its own function, i.e., whether it performs

<sup>12</sup>See recently Vlastos' important article (above, n. 6).

its own task. The function of other virtues, of course, would thus be different from the function of justice. What this means is that if a man is brave, he will *qua* brave act differently from the way he acts *qua* just; that is, he will do different things. It seems quite clear (even apart from Vlastos' elaborate discussion<sup>13</sup>) that we are concerned with what just or brave *people* will do. Then comes the now notorious question: "The thing (*πρᾶγμα*) you named just now, justice, is this itself just or unjust?" Socrates and Protagoras agree that it is just. What, we may ask, is this question about? Justice, as in the earlier dialogues, is in some sense one of the virtues; it is a disposition. Hence the question, "Is it just or unjust?" can have only one answer. The disposition justice is the disposition of a just man. Hence we can call the disposition "just" if the man is just, and "Justice is just" merely tells us that we refer to the man's disposition as justice if it is just. Hence the phrase "Justice is just." And then Socrates and Protagoras also agree that (in the same sense) holiness is holy.

One of the misleading items in this section of the *Protagoras* is that justice and holiness are both called "things" (330c1, 330d4). The word "thing" (*πρᾶγμα*) is odd. Plato writes as follows: "Do you say that there exists a certain holiness?" "Yes." "Then holiness is a certain thing?" "Yes." But "thing" must not be pressed.<sup>14</sup> All Socrates and Protagoras are committed to is that in some sense the disposition justice is real; that justice is not a figment of the imagination; that it can be recognized in the world.<sup>15</sup> But it cannot be emphasized too strongly that the whole discussion deals with virtuous dispositions. And it is people's characters which are in question again when virtue returns to the centre of the discussion in 349a ff. Nothing could indicate more strongly that there are no Forms in the *Protagoras*, and that the ontological status of moral "qualities" is not considered.

One point remains: in 360d the definition (or account) of courage as knowledge of what one ought to fear and what one ought not to fear, rejected in the *Laches*, is accepted. It is the only ethical definition accepted in the early dialogues.

All in all, however, the *Protagoras* hardly changes the scene a whit. What it provides is a warning not to let Plato's non-technical vocabulary deceive us; and the best scholars have been deceived.

## b) The *Meno*

I am prepared to assume that the *Meno* is later than the *Protagoras* and roughly contemporary with the *Gorgias*. Both contain attacks on the

<sup>13</sup>Vlastos, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup>As I (and others) previously pressed it. *Πρᾶγμα* recurs at 349b3, 349c1.

<sup>15</sup>I do not need to spend time on the following sections of the *Protagoras*, for Vlastos has explained that all the predicates here allocated to justice and holiness are Pauline.

Athenian democracy; both give Socrates a fairly positive role; both Meno and Polus are influenced by Gorgias. Neither dialogue, however, presents the Theory of Forms of the middle dialogues.<sup>16</sup> There are a few points in the *Meno* which may be helpful in our present inquiries.

The dialogue opens with the question of whether virtue can be taught. So we should expect that, as in the *Protagoras*, we are dealing with moral characteristics, not with the quality of actions. At 72a6 Socrates, trying to discover what virtue is, complains that he has discovered a whole swarm of virtues. If I wanted to know what is the *ousia* of a bee, he remarks, I would not be satisfied by being told that there are many kinds of bees. I would ask, he continues, whether the different kinds of bees differ *qua* bees or in some other way, e.g., in beauty or size, etc. Meno agrees that they do not differ *qua* bees and that he could identify that by which (dative) they do not differ. The understanding is that if we can identify that by which they do not differ, we have identified the *ousia* of a bee. It is the same with virtues, Socrates continues. However many kinds of virtues there are, they all have a single common *eidos*, through which they are virtues. We look at this *eidos* when we want to show what a virtue is. Meno does not understand, and Socrates says the same thing again in different words. It is like health, he explains: it has the same *eidos* everywhere. The discussion looks similar to that of the *Euthyphro*. We find the appropriate dative, the same notion of looking at the *eidos* to tell whether we have a virtue or not, the same reference to the *ousia* which is recognized by the *eidos*. But there is not even a *pathos-ousia* distinction this time to tell us how *ousia* is being used, and there is no question in the *Meno* but that it is a moral characteristic, not an action, which is being identified as virtuous. In fact there is nothing in these sections of the *Meno* to give any ground for believing that the meaning of either *eidos* or *ousia* differs from that in the *Euthyphro*.<sup>17</sup> Nor is the reference to "standards" any different either.

But, it may be objected, in 74a–75a the situation is different: Socrates defines figure by genus and differentia. He is dealing with real definition, as 74e makes clear: "What is this thing of which 'figure' is the name?" Obviously it is not a nominal definition we are after, and nothing would lead us to expect one. Socrates states at 75a4–5 that he is looking for the element which is "the same in these examples" (τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσι τούτοις ταῦτόν) and eventually comes up with the statement that figure is "the limit of a

<sup>16</sup>E. R. Dodds (*Plato's Gorgias* [Oxford 1959] 23) thinks that the *Gorgias*—with its doctrine of rebirth, and its use of *πίστις* (454d ff.) where the *Meno* (97b ff.) has *δόξα*—is slightly earlier. He offers other reasons which may be accepted; but certainty is unattainable. R. S. Bluck (*Plato's Meno* [Cambridge 1961] 118) agrees with Dodds.

<sup>17</sup>Robinson ([above, n. 3] 55), who interpreted the *Euthyphro* correctly on *eidos*, wants to read the *Meno* as talking about essence at 74d. But, as we shall see, neither the *Meno* nor the *Euthyphro* is dealing with essences.

solid" (76a7). And as an account of colour, he claims that it is an effluence of figures, commensurate with sight, and sensible (76d4-5). Along similar lines, as he claims, Meno then proposes a description of virtue: "Virtue is desiring what is honourable and being able to provide it" (77b4-5). Of these three "definitions" perhaps the first, "limit of solid," may be called a definition by genus and differentia, but the other two are hardly clear examples of such a procedure.<sup>18</sup> So that if Socrates is looking for definition by genus and differentia, it seems that he is not doing so consciously. Far more plausible is the view that he is merely doing what he says; he is trying to identify the things we call "virtue" or "figure": he is looking for a feature (*eidos*, if you will) which identifies *x* as virtue and *y* as figure.

So the Meno looks very like the *Euthyphro* after all. Perhaps the *Euthyphro* is later than is generally supposed. There are minor points in common as well as major: images of Daedalus occur at *Euthyphro* 11d and *Meno* 97d6. Of all the dialogues we have considered so far, these two offer the most technical vocabulary and are consequently the easiest to misread.

### c) The *Cratylus*

The date of this dialogue is much disputed. It will appear from my discussion that I believe it to be earlier than the *Symposium* and the *Phaedo*. The topic of the argument, whether the correctness of names is "natural" or "by convention," is formally new for Plato. That is, it has not been specifically raised in any of the dialogues we have considered up to this point. It has been hitherto assumed that things we call by a common name have something in common; we are now by implication confronted with the question whether all things called conventionally by a common name can in fact be grouped together. The discussion leads us towards an antithesis between names and things, as already appears in 385e-386a. It is agreed that Greeks and barbarians call the same thing by different names. Does it follow that "beings" (*τὰ ὄντα*) are in the same state? Are things (*πράγματα*) to me just as they seem to me, and to you as they seem to you? Or do they have a stability of being (*βεβαιότης τῆς οὐσίας*) of their own? As in the *Euthyphro* and *Meno* we are talking about particulars. Particulars are called *πράγματα*, and now *ὄντα*. But for the first time the question has been raised as to whether the *ousia* of these "beings" is stable or not. We notice that the particulars are not called *γινόμενα*, nor is there any suggestion that their *ousia* is separate from them. Nor

<sup>18</sup>It is noteworthy that even Allen (84) can only find one passage outside the *Euthyphro* (which, as we have seen, he misreads) offering a clear example of definition by genus and differentia, namely the definition of figure at *Meno* 76a. See now G. Nakhnikian, "Elenctic Definitions," in *The Philosophy of Socrates* (ed. Vlastos, New York 1971) 127.

is there even any indication as to how we could understand what this *ousia* is.

It is soon agreed by the discussants that "things" (such as virtues and vices) must have a fixed reality of their own (*ousia*, 386e1-2); they are not variable in relation to us or varied by us. They exist of themselves (*καθ' αὐτά*) in relation to their own being. And it is still particulars which we are dealing with.

The most notorious section of the dialogue is the passage beginning at 389a. What does the carpenter look at, asks Socrates, when he makes a shuttle? At something which is naturally for weaving. And if in the course of production a shuttle is broken, will the carpenter look at the broken one or at the *eidos* itself with reference to which he was making the one he broke? What is this question about? It might appear that Socrates wants to know whether when a carpenter makes a shuttle he thinks about one that works or about one that does not, and thus fashions a new one. He substitutes, however, the word "eidos" for "shuttle" in his second alternative. He might have said: (a) Does he look at a broken shuttle or at a shuttle that works? Instead he says: (b) Does he look at the broken shuttle or at the same *eidos* of a (working) shuttle as before? He then identifies this *eidos* "most correctly" as αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι κέρκισ, which perhaps means "that which is (really) a shuttle."<sup>19</sup>

What are we to get out of this? Something different from the picture in the *Euthyphro* and *Meno*. First of all, we are dealing with a substance, not a quality; but this may not matter. Far more important is the contrast between the functioning shuttle and the broken one. This may be the first reference to what was to become, in a transmuted form, the doctrine of the inferiority of particulars. But in the *Cratylus* we are not told that *all* particulars are defective, let alone ontologically defective, nor is there any suggestion that the *eidos* is in some sense "in another world." There is no evidence that Plato has determined to leave the (perhaps confused) ontological concepts of the *Euthyphro* behind.

What there is, however, is a development of the view of the *eidos* as a distinguishing feature. We have already noticed that Plato has drawn our attention to what the shuttle is for, namely weaving. It seems that he wants to approach the question of the *eidos* of the shuttle from the teleological angle. In the earlier dialogues we were concerned with identifying the object, and the objects were qualities; now, when he is treating of a substance, the question of purpose arises, and the best we can say is that we must approach the question of what is the *eidos* of a shuttle by asking whether the shuttle is effective. But Socrates does not push the

<sup>19</sup>Cf. A. R. Lacey, "Plato's *Sophist* and the Forms," *CQ* n.s. 9 (1959) 51. It must be admitted that "that which a shuttle is" is also possible.



notion of the purpose of shuttles very far; instead he diverges onto the working of particular types of shuttle and how suitable they are for making particular kinds of garments. But at least we can say that now that Socrates has identified the real shuttle with the *eidos* of shuttle, this *eidos* is not simply that characteristic by which *we* can *identify* shuttles, but that feature of shuttles which *makes them* shuttles rather than axes or thermometers. I deliberately avoid the loaded term "essence" at this point. What it is that makes a shuttle a shuttle is quite unclear in the *Cratylus*. The novelty of the approach is twofold: first, the element of purpose which we have observed; and secondly an approach to *eidos* which is not associated with classification or identification, but with ontology. In dialogues like the *Meno* Plato implies that we cannot answer questions like "How is  $x$  acquired?" until we can answer the question "What is  $x$ ?" Now in the *Cratylus* he seems to be making some progress towards understanding in what sense a question "What is  $x$ ?" should be taken, and what kind of answer should be given to it.

Some of the now familiar vocabulary recurs later on in the *Cratylus*. We hear of the *ousia* of a thing at 424b1–2, 424b10, and 431d2–3, and in the ensuing pages Socrates points out that an investigation of names is no sure guide to the nature of things (πράγματα, 431a); indeed it is better to "learn things" (πράγματα μαθάνειν, 439a5–6) through themselves. But how realities (ὄντα now for πράγματα) can be learned or found is set aside as too difficult a question for the time being (439b4–5). Finally Socrates tells of something he often "dreams of"—is Plato here going sharply and clearly beyond the historical Socrates? Are we to say that beautiful itself and good and each one of the beings of this sort is something (i.e., exists) or not? Notice that we are not here dealing with dispositions; and again that so far there is no purpose served by translating αὐτὸ καλόν as "absolute beauty," nor *a fortiori* as "Absolute Beauty." When Cratylus agrees, as Euthyphro and all the others would have done, that αὐτὸ καλόν exists, Socrates inquires as to whether it changes or is always the same. He extracts agreement that the beautiful is always as it is, that is, that if anything can be predicated of τὸ καλόν at any time, it can be predicated of it at all times. All he wants to establish (against Heraclitus) is that knowledge (or the *eidos* of knowledge, 440b2) is always the same, and that the beautiful, the good, etc. are always the same.<sup>20</sup> So there is no further

<sup>20</sup>Ross ([above, n. 2] 20) claims this section marks the first distinct appearance in Plato of the argument from the existence of knowledge to the existence of unchangeable, non-sensible objects. But the *Cratylus* does not mention non-sensible objects, and Socrates is not concerned there with the status of the beautiful. Ross' comment is one that could only be made by someone who either (a) implies that Plato knew when writing the *Cratylus* what he would say in the *Phaedo*, or, more strongly (b) assumes that Plato had a consistent doctrine in all the dialogues, which he only chose to reveal *pedetemptim*.

progress here, no development of the theme of purpose (indeed we are now back to qualities). And perhaps Plato is not yet aware that qualities and substances may have to be treated differently. So the dream adds nothing new—and we are warned against being too sure of what is “historical” material on the basis of what Platonic characters say in a dream and what they say *in propria persona*.<sup>21</sup>

We may conclude this part of the investigation with the observation that if we designate the two-world theory of the *Phaedo* a Theory of Forms, there is nothing which can profitably be given this title in the dialogues prior to the *Symposium*. Although Plato uses the words *eidos* and *idea* in the early dialogues, there is no point even in translating these terms as Form or Idea. Nor is there any hard evidence for maintaining that in any of these earlier dialogues a conscious search for real definition (let alone nominal definition) is occurring.

#### THE *Symposium* AND THE *Phaedo*

A surprising and important feature of the *Symposium* is the careful and limited way in which Forms are introduced; they occur only in a small section of the dialogue, and indeed in only a portion of Diotima's speech. In the section of that speech which ends at 209e4 we have a series of ideas which could appear in many of the dialogues we have considered thus far, and no strikingly new metaphysical proposals. The question of the soul's immortality is avoided, and it is said that immortality is obtained by leaving behind a glorious progeny, either of children or (as in the case of Solon and Lycurgus) of laws and virtuous citizens.<sup>22</sup> And at 209e5 Diotima observes that Socrates might understand “love-matters” thus far,<sup>23</sup> but that she is not sure that he could go further. She then offers the ascent of love from particular beautiful bodies to beautiful bodies in general. The real lover will recognize that beauty (τὸ κάλλος) is akin in each of its bodily instantiations. But now a new line appears. When beauty is recognized to be widespread, it is to be “despised and thought little of” in each particular case. Then beauty can be further observed in souls, in laws and institutions and in the various kinds of knowledge. The lover will come to see the “vast sea of the beautiful.” Yet even now,

<sup>21</sup>Thus I consider that J. V. Luce (“The Theory of Ideas in the *Cratylus*,” *Phronesis* 10 [1965] 21–36) has not gone far enough, though there is something to be learned from his article. In particular Luce's comment (29) that “I would grant the ‘unitarian’ that the Ideas are the ‘conception d'ensemble’ underlying all three dialogues,” has to be rejected.

<sup>22</sup>As Dover points out, this need not imply that Plato did not accept the immortality of the soul when he wrote the *Symposium* (“The date of Plato's *Symposium*,” *Phronesis* 10 [1965] 19–20). Dover dates the *Symposium* to the period between 384 and 378.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. J. Stenzel, *Plato's Method of Dialectic* (Trans. D. J. Allan, Oxford 1940) 4; W. K. C. Guthrie (above, n. 5) 397 and note 1.

apart from the emphasis on despising beauty in any particular bodily manifestation, we do not find a sharply new theory, though certainly the tone is unprecedented. But, says Diotima, when we see this sea of beauty and enjoy it, we are able to perceive a kind of knowledge that is of a beautiful thing now to be described (*ἡ ἐστὶ καλοῦ τοιοῦδε*). The implication is certainly that this hitherto unknown beauty is itself beautiful; indeed perhaps that nothing else is beautiful.

Diotima then recites what are now known as the standard features of Forms; Beauty always exists, does not come to be and pass away, does not wax or wane. It is not beautiful in one way and ugly in another, or only beautiful at times, etc. Nor is it a beautiful particular, a face, a piece of knowledge; nor in general is it in something else (*ἐν ἑτέρῳ τινι*), that is, as a quality. The description so far indicates 1) that beauty is eternal; 2) that beauty is not relative; 3) that beauty is not a quality. And all this is summed up by saying that it is *αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό, μονοειδές* (not relative, 211b1), *μεθ' αὐτοῦ* (= not a quality), *ἀεὶ ὄν* (eternal). In particular it is the *ἀεὶ ὄν* which is new, and, when coupled with what Diotima suggests next, namely that other inferior beauties partake of Beauty, this gives us almost the fully developed theory of Forms. What Plato does not say, however, though commentators often assume that he does, is that the Form, which always exists, would do so in the logically possible situation of there being no beautiful particulars. In other words, although Plato is emphasizing in a new way the eternal duration of Beauty and the transience of beautiful particulars, he has not thought through—or has not shown how he has thought through—the possible implications of these ontological propositions. Nor has he explicitly shown us what answer he would make to an objector who claimed that Beauty must be regarded only as a universal, unless its status “outside” the mind and “outside” a series of particulars can be clarified. That it is not intended to be merely a universal, however, is clear; else it could not be an object of love with which we can become acquainted. Ross is half consciously aware of Plato's reticence on this point. He writes: “A more definite assertion of transcendence than any we have found hitherto occurs in a famous passage of the *Symposium*.” But he then adds on the same page, “It is legitimate to suppose that, translated into the language of philosophy, the passage only affirms, not the separate existence of the Idea of beauty, but its difference from all its embodiments.”<sup>24</sup> Of course, strictly speaking, the word “Idea” does not occur in the *Symposium* at all.

The beautiful itself is certainly beautiful in the *Symposium*, and compared with Beauty nothing else is beautiful. Hence, as Vlastos has said, “The beautiful is beautiful” cannot be understood in a Pauline sense.<sup>25</sup> This is the first dialogue where we find non-Pauline self-predica-

<sup>24</sup>Ross (above, n. 2) 21.

<sup>25</sup>Vlastos (above, n. 6) 456.

tion implied throughout, as well as formally stated at 211c8-d1. And the non-Pauline sense is specifically associated with the doctrine (again novel though perhaps partly prepared for by the *Cratylus*) that *ontologically* all particulars are inferior (i.e., they are "becoming," while the Form is eternally existent). It is important to recognize this; yet even here Plato has not gone the whole way: the pattern-copy model does not occur in the *Symposium*. It is not *formally* stated that the particulars are imperfect copies of a perfect Form. Leaving aside the non-appearance of the term "Form," we see that particulars still *partake* of the Form at 211b2; they do not *copy* it. In fact it is curious that in the section where Diotima does speak of the particulars as an image (εἰδώλου, 212a4), the contrast is not with an original or standard (παράδειγμα) but with "the truth." Does this mean that a two-world theory is absent from the *Symposium*? No, for we do hear of "looking there" (ἐκεῖσε βλέποντος), but it seems as though the implications are not yet worked out.

So we reach the *Phaedo*, in which Aristotle seems to recognize the classical Theory of Forms,<sup>26</sup> and which Plato himself seems to use as the paradigm case of that theory when he offers objections to it in the *Parmenides*. Support, however, for the view that at the time of the *Symposium* Plato had not come the full distance, might be afforded if we could find that, even in the *Phaedo*, the "classical" Theory of Forms is not immediately stated in such unambiguous terms as it has been presented by modern scholars and ancient platonists.

It is often stated that Forms are first mentioned in the *Phaedo* in 65d. But we should notice that even here Plato's language is not very different from what we have seen in earlier dialogues; even when we reach the section about cognition (66a1-3) we cannot be certain of the independent status of the entities named. Socrates asks, "Do we say that the just itself exists (= is something) or does not exist (is nothing)?" The same question is then asked about "beautiful" and "good." These and other similars are then described as the reality of everything (ἀπάντων τῆς οὐσίας), and they are realities which we recognize as far as possible with the mind, not with the senses. But it is not made clear where these realities are at this point: whether they exist only in particulars, or also apart from particulars. The ambiguity is eventually clarified, however, in the notoriously over-discussed passage about equality (74a-75a).

Let us follow some points in the argument. First of all it is agreed that the equal itself exists and that the equal itself is not an equal stick or stone or any other particular. Then it is argued that, since we are aware of the equal itself, we must know about it *somehow*; and we must have acquired this knowledge in some way. Next Socrates claims that we did not get it from looking at equally-sized sticks or stones. In other words our knowledge of the equal is not derived merely by ascending from

<sup>26</sup>Cf. *Metaph.* 991b3, 1080a2; *Gen. Corr.* 335b10 ff.

particulars to Forms—and later in the dialogue the claim is made that we knew the Forms, the perfect examples of particular qualities, before we were born into the world of sensible particulars (75c). This doctrine is quite absent from the *Symposium*, where there is no mention, and apparently no need, for a pre-natal knowledge of Form. What has happened is that the *Meno*'s doctrine of recollection, developed originally without any connection with Forms, has been applied to the *Symposium*'s notion of the inadequacy of the particular. The result is the clear view, eventually developed in the *Phaedo*, that Forms exist apart from particulars and can be "seen" at some time (i.e., before birth) apart from particulars. This suggestion, admittedly reconcilable with what is found in the *Symposium*, is only clearly expressed in the *Phaedo*. With it comes an unambiguous doctrine of the ontological separation of the Forms, and the sharp ontological distinction between "greatness in us" and "greatness in itself" (102d).

The *Phaedo* contains two explicit theses which are essential for the full-blown Theory of Forms: 1) particulars fall short and are deficient when compared with Forms; 2) Forms *can* be recognized by the mind (though not in this life) without the prior use of the senses on particulars. In the *Meno* it is certainly not Forms which are recognized in a previous existence; in the *Symposium* recollection is not discussed at all. Yet in the *Symposium* the existence of ontologically separate Forms is present by implication, albeit in a version less clear than that of the *Phaedo*—and this rules out the possibility of the *Meno*'s being later than the *Symposium*. Of course the possibility remains that the *Phaedo* precedes the *Symposium*—the argument would be precisely that recollection is not used in the *Symposium* and that Plato had in fact discarded it in favour of a better theory of knowledge. But this argument, if correct, would prove too much. Plato seems to accept recollection in the *Republic*,<sup>27</sup> and explicitly accepts it in the *Phaedrus* (249c1). We must agree that the order of the dialogues is most likely *Meno*, *Symposium*, *Phaedo*.

There is a further aspect of the theory of recollection which is implied but not stated—and which is essential for the doctrine of Forms in the *Phaedo*. It is that all true knowledge is acquired by direct acquaintance. The *Meno* is the first dialogue to suggest this. We see the objects of knowledge in a previous life; and the difference between knowledge and opinion about the way from Athens to Larissa is that the man who knows has first-hand experience of the road (97ab). Similarly in the *Symposium* we need first-hand vision of the Form of Beauty; and in the *Phaedo* we acquire this first-hand vision in an earlier existence. If "seeing" the Forms with the mind is a direct experience comparable in its directness with sensing particulars, and if knowledge is only of this direct kind, Plato seems to have assumed that the objects of such direct contact must have

<sup>27</sup>Cf. N. Gulley, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London 1962) 53.

an objective, independent existence. In the *Meno* the objects of mental vision are not Forms, but when Plato decided that the mind must see objects which are neither particulars nor merely in particulars because they are not defective, he assumed that these "formal" objects must exist in a real world, not only apart from particulars, but outside the mind of the viewer. Hence the doctrine of the transcendent Idea.

As we have seen, Vlastos now holds that the first case of self-predication in a non-Pauline sense occurs in the *Symposium*. This is also the first dialogue to get near the purely transcendent Form. The Theory of Forms, as offered in the *Symposium* and *Phaedo*, does imply self-predication, as must any version of that theory which assumes that Forms are separately existing entities. So Vlastos' discoveries about Pauline predication may be used in the dialogues down to the *Meno*, but not in the central dialogues, unless Plato there uses "Socratic" ideas and exhibits verbal, if not necessarily real inconsistency. Similarly in the more "Socratic" dialogues Plato is looking for means of identifying particulars; in the dialogues where we meet knowledge by acquaintance, the question of identification gives place to questions of epistemology and ontology. In the *Symposium* and *Phaedo* the question is no longer, "What feature have  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  (all of which are beautiful) in common?" but, "Granted that  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$  apparently have 'beautiful' features in common, how do we *know* that these features are really beautiful?" And if they are not, what is? In these dialogues it is no longer accepted as self-evident that we know what "beautiful", "good", and other predicates mean. And the explication of their meaning is metaphysical.

This discussion began with Allen's book on Plato's "Earlier Theory of Ideas." It concludes that it is unhelpful to speak of such a theory, and that almost all the features of what has traditionally and helpfully been called a Theory of Ideas are missing until the *Symposium* and *Phaedo*. Rather it suggests that Plato's earlier problems about the identification of common qualities led him, through a series of *aporiai*, towards the formulation of a philosophical theory (The Theory of Forms) which both resolved his earlier difficulties and reset his whole philosophical stage. He should be thought of not as replacing one Theory of Forms by another, but of emerging from a period of intellectual puzzlement with the theory of transcendent Forms on his hands, the apparently inevitable product of a process of enquiry which he could not and did not foresee. If this is correct, we can see why it is easy to read back a Theory of Forms into the earlier dialogues, for we may say that these dialogues contain many seeds mixed together. Some of these seeds were of the Theory of Forms, and these were the ones which grew.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>I should like to thank a reader for *Phoenix* for many helpful comments.