Plato: the Essentials


Plato was born in 428/427 BC in Athens, toward the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, in one of the noblest families of the city. Everything suggested he was destined to a political career. But the behavior of some of his close relatives, especially Critias, a cousin of his mother, who was one of the leaders of the Thirty Tyrants taking power in Athens after its defeat and the victory of Sparta in the Peloponnesian War (404 BC), and the condemnation to death of his friend and mentor Socrates¹ by the democrats who regained power in Athens after the fall of the Thirty Tyrants (399 BC) led him to distance himself from active politics and to embark on a theoretical reflection about politics. He founded in Athens a “school” called the Academy,² in which he intended to train future political leaders, so as to put in practice the results of his theoretical reflections. He wrote, probably toward the end of his life, a written support for his educational program under the form of dialogues arranged in seven tetralogies, each made up of an introductory dialogue and a trilogy.³ These dialogues don’t purport to give answers, those of Plato, to questions brought forth in them, nor to develop “theories”, here again, those (assumed to be those) of Plato, but to invite readers to think by themselves, paving a way meant to help them ask themselves the right questions, understand how these different questions relate to one another and avoid them too simplistic answers which didn’t sufficiently take into account the complexity and connexity of problems and the order in which they should be solved to avoid falling into inconsistencies, sophisms or absurdities.

The initial question asked by Plato is simple: what makes a human being fit to lead fellow human beings and which skills and qualities are required for such a task? To answer this question, we must first determine what is expected from a “good” leader. Answering this new question implies that we understand what those human beings whose life must be organized are.

For Plato, Man (as a member of a species, independent of sex, in Greek, *anthrôpos*) is by nature an animal made to live in society. The basic social unit in Greece in his time was the “city (polis)”, so that this social dimension of Man could be expressed by saying that he is a “political animal”, that is, an animal made to live in a *polis*. It can also be said that Plato looks at Man as a *poliês* (“citizen”) and that what most interests him is the *politeia*, the kind of life fit for a *poliês*, especially, but not exclusively, with regard to one’s “public” life, as well as the organization of the life of all the *politaï* (“citizens”) within the “city (polis)”, a task expected from the political

¹ Socrates, born around 470/469 BC, was then about seventy years old.
² After the name of the Athenian hero Academos, to which the garden in which he established his school was dedicated.
³ We know next to nothing about the way Plato wrote and organized his dialogues, except for a few scarce indications found in some of them (for instance, that the *Sophist* is the continuation of the *Theaetetus* and the *Statesman* the continuation of the *Sophist*, and also that the *Critias* is the continuation of the *Timaeus*). We also ignore when each one of them was written and possibly “published” (that is, made available to the public at large outside the Academy). The suggestion I’m making here, that they compose a unique work structured in tetralogies, is in fact an *hypothesis* I’m opposing to the prevalent *hypothesis* according to which Plato composed his dialogues as mostly independent works during his whole life, over a period of about fifty years from Socrates death to his own death around 348/347 BC, at age about eighty, and that these dialogues reflect his intellectual evolution over this period of time of about fifty years. The structure in tetralogies I’m proposing is described in appendix 1, page 19.
⁴ As a general rule, when, in this paper, a word between quotes is followed by a word in italics between parentheses, this word is the Greek word corresponding to the preceding English word. When I use directly the Greek word in the text, I italicize it, usually followed by its translation into English between quotes in parentheses. A lexicon of Greek words important for the understanding of Plato is included in the second part of this paper, starting at page 20. It includes among other all the Greek words used in this paper. All the words included in the lexicon appear in the lateral Bookmarks panel of Adobe Reader.
leaders.\footnote{The Greek word \textit{politeia} has this whole range of meanings, both individual and collective.} Indeed, \textit{Politeia} is the Greek title of the central dialogue of the set of Plato’s twenty-eight dialogues, the one constituting their keystone, ill translated into English as “\textit{Republic}”.

What distinguishes Man, “political” animal, from all other animals, is the fact that this life in society allowed him to develop an interpersonal communication tool, \textit{logos} (“language, speech”), which is not limited to the production of various kinds of sounds, but implies the utterance of sounds potentially bearers of meaning allowing, in some cases at least, to understand one another and to efficiently cooperate through the use of “dialogue (\textit{dialogos})”.

The organization of men and women’s social life, and thus the origin of the \textit{polis} (“city” as the setting of social life), rests on the sharing of tasks, made easier by the ability to communicate through (\textit{dia})\textit{logos}. This sharing starts with the tasks necessary for survival (eating, lodging, clothing), distributed between individuals based on needs and skills of each one, then grows to encompass protection against attacks from other cities and internal strife and to the regulation of social life within the group (the “leaders”). As this social life organizes and frees time for other activities, new tasks appear and must be distributed among the members of the group (cure sick people, arbitrate conflicts, organize recreational activities and relations with other groups, develop “artistic”, and no longer only “survival-oriented”, activities, and so on). And if the city wants to last, thoughts must be given to the renewal of generations and the education of youth. Each one of these new tasks complicates the organization of social life and thus the task of the governing body.

Anyway, what makes all this possible is the ability of human beings to practice (\textit{dia})\textit{logos} and thus, it is necessary to properly understand how this tool works, what it gives access to and what are its power and limits.

The ability human beings have to develop a language having meaning, a \textit{logos}, is closely related to their ability to think and to understand their environment, that is, to display intelligence (\textit{nous}).

Like all animals, human beings are endowed with several senses, two of which play a key role: sight, which gives them a particularly rich and pregnant perception of their environment, and hearing, which makes dialogue, and thus \textit{logos}, possible. Human intelligence develops from data provided by the senses. What characterizes it is its ability to identify, amongst always changing data from the senses, more or less complex clusters of recurrent features detachable from the moment (time) and place (space) where they are perceived, to which it may associate names that can be reused each time these same clusters reappear at different places and at different times. Thus, sight gives access to colors, to which the mind may associate more or less complex and regular forms; hearing allows it to recognize sound modulations which it may associate with specific words. These clusters being given names may themselves participate in more complex clusters or on the contrary be analyzed in more elementary components. The fact that we are endowed with several senses allows us to understand that what might be the cause of our perceptions is not limited to what one or another of these senses allows us to grasp of it, but might have an “individuality” of which each sense allows us to perceive only one aspect: thus for instance, sight only allows us to perceive the visual appearance of a “something” (a human being) whose words, understandable by us and that our mind is capable of associating with those visual perceptions, give us another perception. This power of “abstraction” (in the etymological sense of “extraction”) makes it possible to identify, and thus to name, both “clusters” directly corresponding to “individuals” perceptible by the senses and clusters not directly associated with such “individuals”, such as, for instance, numbers or relations (great/small, young/old, and so on), or else “qualities” such as “beautiful”, “good”, “just” and so on.

The human mind is also capable of recognizing recurrences not only of such clusters, whether named or not, but also of sequences of clusters always occurring in the same order, which leads it to assume necessary or quasi necessary links between the various elements of
those sequences and gives birth to the notions of cause and effect. This recognition affords human beings a certain level of practical efficiency by allowing them to set “ends”, “goals” and to devise “methods” to reach them and distribute tasks contributing to the attainment of the objectives. And the fact that not any speech makes it possible to reach the set goals “proves” in a way that language refers, in some cases at least, to something other than itself and that this “something” imposes its law upon it if one wants to reach the set ends.

These observations, which result from experience, must be kept in mind and explained if one wants to improve the efficiency of the tool which logos is and allow human beings to better live together.

This “objectivity” of an environment (which, for each human being, includes all other human beings) which imposes, up to a certain point, its “law” upon our thinking and our action, is acknowledged by Plato through the use of the Greek word pathèma to describe the perceptions of our senses and mind/intelligence (nous), since pathèma is derived from the verb paschein, whose general meaning is “to be acted upon”, “to suffer”, “to be affected”, which leads, for pathèma, to “affection” in the general sense of “what affects us one way or another, from a physical, intellectual, aesthetic, moral or sentimental standpoint”. And, by complementarity, to talk about what is at the origin of these “affections”, he uses the word pragma, derived from the verb pratttein, meaning “to act”, precisely in opposition to paschein (“be acted upon”), often translated by “thing”, but whose meaning is much broader than this (“fact” would be a more open translation of it). In other words, there exists around us “activators” of our senses and mind/intelligence (nous), pragmata, which elicit, without us having anything to do for that, “affections” of them (senses and mind/intelligence), pathèmata.

For Plato, these pathèmata are not limited to the raw perception by one or another of our senses, or directly by our mind/intelligence (nous), of what they are capable of grasping of the pragma activating them, but include the manner in which our mind reacts to these stimulations, what this activation of one of our senses or of our mind/intelligence induces in us. Two famous images developed in sequence in the Republic and complementing one another, the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave, help us better understand this. The analogy of the line inventories the various pathèmata which affect us, using sight as example in the sensible realm and the allegory of the cave illustrates this inventory on the example of human beings as pragmata capable of affecting our senses and mind/intelligence.

Thus, the analogy of the line compares two modes of perception: perception through sight and perception through mind/intelligence (nous), describing what these two modes of perception relate to as “visible (horaton)” and “intelligible (noèton)” respectively, assigning them to two segments of a single line (we are not in the case of two “worlds” apart from one another, but in the case of two parts of a unique whole). Then, taking into account the manner in which, in each case, our intelligence interprets what it apprehends through the sense (sight in this case) or directly, he splits each segment into two parts to end up with four segments. What makes the difference in each case is whether or not the mind understands that what it apprehends in either register is not the whole of what activates its perception, but only the “appearance (eidos)” which the “organ” through which this perception takes place is capable of grasping of it. The “image (eikôn)” perceived by sight is

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6 Pragmata is the plural of pragma. The word “activator” I use here carries in English what the root pratttein (“to act”) imports in the word pragma.

7 Pathèmata is the plural of pathèma.

8 At Republic V, 477c1-d6, Socrates introduces the generic term dunamis (“power, ability to do, potentiality”), of which he gives two examples, sight and hearing, saying that, for him, a dunamis is characterized by “what it is upon (eph’ hôi esti)” and “what it accomplishes (ho apergazetai)”. Here, we find symmetrically in the “affections (pathèmata)” these two components: what the “activator (pragma)” activates (sight or hearing for instance) and what it produces in the mind/intelligence in terms of understanding.

9 The analogy of the line is found at the end of book VI of the Republic, at Republic VI, 509d6-511-e5, and the allegory of the cave at the beginning of book VII, at Republic VII, 514a1-517a7.
not the whole of what activates it. But the “image (eikón)” formed by our intelligence (nous), expressed through the words we use to talk about it, is not the whole of what we are talking about either and the fact that we give it a name doesn’t mean that we “know” it. Here again, we can only grasp an “appearance (eidos)”, intelligible this time rather than visible, but still only an appearance, even if it is richer than the mere visible appearance. This is the reason why Plato uses the same word eidos, derived from a root meaning “to see”, to talk about them. Indeed, nothing allows us to assume that the case of intelligence might be different from that of sight, hearing, touch or another of our senses, about which we don’t have much trouble admitting that they offer us only a partial grasp of what activates them, even if we tend to privilege sight as a means of “knowing” how these “activators” are. As a matter of fact, since indeed we only have at our disposal the five senses and the mind/intelligence (nous) to grasp what is around us, it is impossible for us by design to know if some features of what activates these means of perception escape them all.

The allegory of the cave offers us an illustration of this to help us better understand it. This famous allegory, misunderstood by most scholars, who didn’t take enough time to “decode” all its details, is in fact an illustration of the motto Plato’s Socrates made his: “get to know thyself (gnôthi sauton)”. It stages anthrôpoi (“human beings”) as subjects capable of knowledge in the guise of prisoners chained at the bottom of a cave, unable to turn their head and thus, so long as they stay in this situation, only capable of seeing the wall of the cave facing them. Behind them, along a road, hidden by a wall, anthrôpoi walk by, bearing statues of men and other things rising above the wall. Farther away behind them, a fire lights the scene and casts shadows of what rises above the wall on the wall of the cave facing the chained prisoners, so that the only things they can see are the shadows of the statues rising above the wall along the road. The invisible men bearing these statues and “animating” them by making them move, can also talk and the wall of the cave returns an echo of their voices. The allegory depicts the freeing of one of the prisoners, who is then forced to turn around to look at the statues above the wall, and then to exit from the cave through a lateral opening up high. Outside the cave, the freed prisoner can see anthrôpoi, first, so long as he is not yet accustomed to the brightness of the light of the sun, not directly, but through their shadows and reflections on the surface of bodies of water, then, once habituated, directly. But he also discovers stars in the sky and the sun, here again, first seen through reflections on water bodies, then directly.

What must be understood, to properly understand this allegory, is that the prisoners, the bearers in the cave behind the wall and the men outside the cave, all referred to with the word anthrôpoi, always in the plural, are the same individuals, only considered from different stand-points. And they are not “men” and “women” in the material sense of the words, but the immaterial principles of movement, life and intelligibility which “animate” these creatures, called psuchai by Plato, a word usually translated by “souls” but which shouldn’t be understood too readily in the sense it has taken in Christian tradition. The prisoners stand for these psuchai as

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10 In Greek, one of the verbs meaning “to know”, eidenai, is in fact a past form of a verb meaning “to see”, idein: “I saw”, thus “I know”.
11 “Plato’s Socrates” means the Socrates who is staged by Plato all through his dialogues, which are not journalistic reports on actual events of the historical Socrates’ life, but literary creation of Plato, intent on illustrating what he wants us to understand in a way which remains true to the spirit rather than the letter of his “teacher”: the historical Socrates probably never said the things Plato has the character Socrates of his dialogues say in the conversations he stages in his dialogues, with the specific words and in the specific contexts described in them, not even those he has him say at his trial.
12 The exit from the cave is on the side, not behind the fire as usually depicted in graphic illustrations of the allegory, which means that the prisoner, to exit the cave, doesn’t have to go on the other side of the wall along the road which hides the bearers.
13 Psuchai is the plural of the Greek word psuchè, which is the root of the English prefix “psych(o)-” found in such words as “psychology” or “psychiatrist”. In the Alcibiades, Socrates has young Alcibiades, his interlocutor in this dialogue, agree that man (anthrôpos) is neither the body, nor the combination of body and psuchè, but psuchè alone, for which the body is no more than a “tool” (Alcibiades, 129e3-130c7).
trying to translate them into English could only cloud the issue. Since he names them with preexisting words which already had other meanings in the Greek of the time, associated with the highest level of perception in the intelligible realm (person, with the defects and limitations of the organs of perception of that person (for instance the fact that the person might be color blind, in the visible realm, or of very limited intelligence, in the intelligible realm), may have of what he/she perceives through one or another of his/her senses or through intelligence, but what is perceptible of it by this organ (one of the senses or intelligence) supposed to be at its highest level of perfection for a human being. In other words, it is what the nature of this organ makes it possible to perceive, not what a specific instance of this organ, whichever it may be, is capable of perceiving. It is in that sense that the eidoi may be thought of as having an “objective” reality.

The two “affections (pathemata)” these “souls (psychai)” may suffer in the visible/sensible realm are on the one hand the one consisting, for the prisoners who remain “chained”, to assume that human beings are nothing more than the shadows of statues of men they see moving on the wall of the cave facing them, that is, that a human being (or anything else perceptible by sight) is limited to his/her visible appearance and that you know a man or a woman (or anything) as soon as you have seen him/her, and on the other hand, the one affecting who has understood that sight doesn’t reveal everything of what is seen and that a human being (or anything else perceptible by sight) is more than his/her visible appearance (the statue and not only its shadow), but doesn’t go so far as to assume that they are more than the material compound which sight and the other senses allow him/her to apprehend. 14

In the intelligible realm, the first “affection (pathema)” is the one affecting those who think that words give us a sufficient knowledge of what they name, when they are no more than audible “stickers” or visible concatenations of conventional graphic signs referring to “appearances (eidoi)” 15 which we can to a certain extent apprehend through the mind but which we can compare with the perception of others only through words, which makes this perception incomunicable as such in the end. It is only when we have understood that words are not what they point at and that “appearances (eidoi)” we associate them with are the appearances accessible to our intelligence of human beings of “activators (pragmata)” “existing” outside them, as can be deducted from the fact that we can talk about them with different words, if only in different languages, of an “existence” we can say nothing about, but which is “proved” by the efficiency of the dialogues in which we refer to them, when these dialogues turn out to be efficient (that is, produce the expected results for those who take part in them), that we are subject to the last one of the “affections (pathemata)” described by Socrates, the one where, in the intelligible realm, we are no longer prisoners of the “images” which the words are and are able to use them in a totally mastered

14 The Greek names Plato gives these “affections” are of secondary importance, as can be seen by the fact that he waits till the end of the analogy to list them and besides, that, when, a few pages later in the Republic, he recalls the analogy, he changes one of these names, and not the least, since it is the one naming the “affection (pathema)” associated with the highest level of perception in the intelligible realm (Republic VII, 533e7-534a1). What is important is to properly understand the distinctions he makes between them and the principles (the logos) leading to them. Since he names them with preexisting words which already had other meanings in the Greek of the time, trying to translate them into English could only cloud the issue.

15 Eidoi is the plural of eidos. An eidos, whether visible or intelligible, is not the specific perception that a given person, with the defects and limitations of the organs of perception of that person (for instance the fact that the person might be color blind, in the visible realm, or of very limited intelligence, in the intelligible realm), may have of what he/she perceives through one or another of his/her senses or through intelligence, but what is perceptible of it by this organ (one of the senses or intelligence) supposed to be at its highest level of perfection for a human being. In other words, it is what the nature of this organ makes it possible to perceive, not what a specific instance of this organ, whichever it may be, is capable of perceiving. It is in that sense that the eidoi may be thought of as having an “objective” reality.
way, without getting trapped by them, that is, have become masters in the art of dialoguing (to dialegethai), individuals described by Plato’s Socrates as dialektikoi, a word usually improperly translated, or rather transcribed, into “dialecticians” by people unable, especially after Hegel, to explain what the “dialectic” Plato is talking about is.

In the imagery of the allegory of the cave, the first stage is pictured by the situation of the prisoner who just came out of the cave and is dazzled by the light of the sun so he can only see shadows and reflections in bodies of water of the men/souls outside. The intelligible “shadows” these anthrôpoi cast, are merely their words and speeches, their logoi, and their intelligible “reflections” are the words and speeches about them from other anthrôpoi that we hear or read. All these words, all these logoi, indeed give us a perception of the one they talk about, an immaterial one, purely abstract and exclusively intelligible, but which teaches us more about the person they refer to than mere sight, a physical contact or even a dissection, in that is allows us to understand that person.

But at that point, we are still no farther than words. On the last stage, Plato stays quite evasive and only mentions it without explaining it, and there is a good reason for that: any explanation would still be nothing more than words and thus would bring us back down to the previous stage!

The progress of the freed prisoner doesn’t end with the sight of the anthrôpoi themselves and all that surrounds them outside the cave, which are the intelligible dimension of all that can be seen inside the cave. There remains the heavens and stars, and above all, the sun which made the vision of all there was to be seen outside the cave possible. These “activators” of our intelligence don’t have a sensible counterpart inside the cave. They picture what we would call nowadays abstract “concepts”, with no sensible dimension, such as “good”, “beautiful”, “just”, what Plato’s Socrates calls ideai (“ideas”). These “ideas (ideai)” are in fact a special kind of eidè (“appearances”), purely intelligible, and are not limited to “qualities” such as those I took as examples above. In fact, all the words we use refer to an idea corresponding to the principle of intelligibility of what the word designates, but if, at Republic X, 596a6-7, Plato says that “we are in the habit of positing some unique eidos for each of the many [things] upon which we impose the same name”, moving from the fact of experience of the shared name to the eidos, rather than to the idea, it is because, as he as Socrates say in the allegory of the cave, names are created by the prisoners for the shadows they see and thus, they do it based on the purely visible “appearance” pictured by the shadows, not based on real knowledge of what they name, on a perfect understanding of the principles of intelligibility of what they give those names to, thus based on something which is only an eidos, not yet an idea. And indeed, Plato’s Socrates is not afraid of talking of an idea of such a trivial thing as what is designated by the word “bed”, that is, of something

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16 This is the reason why, at the beginning of the analogy of the line, Socrates asks Glaucon to split the original line into two unequal segments (Republic VI, 509d6), the one corresponding to the visible/sensible and the other to the intelligible. We should note that ever since Antiquity, scholars disagree on whether we should read in Plato’s text at this point anisa (“unequal”) or isa (“equal”). But, as far as I know, nobody so far has given a convincing explanation why we should prefer the one or the other, and nobody thought of looking for that explanation in the allegory of the cave which immediately follows the analogy.

17 Ideai is the plural of idea, a Greek word close in meaning to eidos, which is also derived from a root meaning “to see” (idein). This is the root of the English word “idea”.

18 See Republic VII, 515b4-5: “if they were able to dialogue (dialegethai) with one another, don’t you think that, the same [things] being around [again], they would take the habit of giving names to those [things] they see?”

19 It is always difficult with Plato to attribute a precise meaning to each word he uses, in the first place precisely because he doesn’t want to fix a “technical” vocabulary which would suggest that words are sufficient to give us an exact knowledge of what they refer to and would make us forget that the goal is to reach a knowledge of what is beyond words, and besides, because he often adapts his vocabulary to the interlocutors he stages and has his Socrates do the same, so that, in different contexts, the same words may take different meanings, even when spoken by Socrates. This problem is particularly obvious precisely when he is looking for words to refer to what words refer to from a generic standpoint, thus with words such as eidos and idea, which, to make things even trickier, already had many different meanings in the Greek of his time.
which is not even a product of nature, but an artefact manufactured by man.  

In fact, more than the words which might be used to designate what the stars in heaven stand for in the allegory, the important point is that we are not in a binary scheme setting two “worlds” in opposition, with on the one side what is inside the cave (the visible/sensible “world”) and on the other side pure abstract “ideas” outside the cave (the “world of ideas” we are used to associate with Plato), but in a scheme where everything present in the cave, that is, material creatures, is found also outside the cave and constitutes a mandatory pathway before turning toward the heaven of “ideas”.  

Plato says nothing about what the heavens and stars picture in the allegory and leaves it to readers to figure out by themselves. If, ever since the beginning of the allegory, he focuses on anthropoi (“human beings”, always in the plural), offering four different perceptions of them (shadows of statues of men and echo of the voice of the bearers, then the statues of men themselves, inside the cave, shadows and reflections of human beings, then these human beings themselves outside the cave), nowhere in the allegory he explicitly mentions an “idea of Man” in heavens. But, assuming that he intended the moon, the only star mentioned by name aside from the sun about which he explicitly tells us what it stands for (I’ll soon come back to it), to picture this idea, by analogy with the previous stage, where the only kind of creatures explicitly mentioned by name among those the freed prisoner could see once outside the cave were anthropoi (“human beings”), what this identification would teach us about Man? The only thing it could suggest is that, in the same way the moon is by far the biggest star which we can see in heaven at night, the “idea of Man”, that is, the knowledge of what makes the perfection of human beings, should be our biggest concern as human beings (“get to know thyself”).  

Another thing the identification of the stars as picturing the ideas behind the words we use could teach us is that, in the same way stars, which all look alike, cannot be identified individually, independently of one another, but only through their relative position with respect to all others, words and “ideas” they refer to cannot be understood independently of one another, but only based on the relations they have with one another. Thus, there is no use trying to figure out what this or that star in heaven stands for since, to a naked eye, they all look alike (except the moon and the sun): heaven only makes sense for us as a whole in which only clusters of
stars are identifiable. And similarly, words taken in isolation mean nothing; only “constellations” of words, that is, sentences and speeches, may potentially have meaning, if the relationship between ideai they suggest correspond to the actual relationship between these ideai.

The key issue then is to figure out how we can determine whether this is the case or not. Regarding material beings, animate or inanimate objects, perceptible by senses, acquired habit and shared experience through dialogue (which instills this habit from infancy) usually allow us to figure that out without much difficulty. On the contrary, as soon as we deal with abstract “concepts”, things are not that simple and the risk of subjectivity is great. For Plato, what allows us to avoid such subjectivity is the existence, in the purely intelligible realm, of an “idea” which has for human beings an unquestionable “objectivity”, the idea of the “good”. Not moral Good, or not exclusively, but “good” in its broadest sense, including “good” things at the material level. In the section of the Republic immediately preceding the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave, Socrates draws a parallel between the good and the sun and, in its commentary of the allegory, he explicitly identifies the fire inside the cave with the sun and less categorically the sun outside the cave with the idea of the good. The starting point of this parallel between good and sun is the observation that any human being always acts in view of what he deems good for oneself. And it doesn’t matter whether they are right or wrong because any human being can recognize that what (s)he does at some point in time deeming it good for oneself, may turn out to have consequences (s)he will deem bad for oneself, here again, according to one’s own criteria of “good” and “bad”, whether they be right or wrong. In other words, everybody wants what is good for oneself and may experience the fact that it is not sufficient to believe something good for it to be so in all its consequences, according to one’s own criteria of good and bad. In short, we can’t decide what is good and bad for us and yet, the good for oneself is what we are all looking for.

What the parallel between good and sun tries to make us understand is that, in the same way the light of the sun is required for functional eyes to see, what gives meaning to what a human intelligence is capable of grasping is the idea of the good. To say it differently, intelligence is the tool given human beings to allow them to find together their way toward what is good for

23 The Greek word used by Plato is the neuter form of the adjective agathos preceded by the article, to agathon (“the good”); agathos means “good” in all registers, physical as well as moral. In this part of the Republic, Plato uses the expression hê tou agathou idea (“the idea of the good”).

24 When Socrates mentions, in the allegory, the reflections of the sun, which the prisoner can see before trying to look directly at the sun itself, these reflections stand for the speeches (we are in the intelligible and at the level of “images”) held on the good by the city, that is, the “image” of the good devised by the community we live in.

25 This is the properly understood meaning of what is often presented as a Socratic “paradox”, often expressed under the form “no one does voluntarily/knowingly evil.” In fact, what Socrates means is that no one does voluntarily/knowingly what he/she deems, not “evil” in a moral sense, but “bad” for oneself. To say it differently, no one is a masochist, and even those called “masochist” are looking for something they deems “good” for themselves through the immediate self-inflicted or accepted “bad” treatment they subject to. Thus, it is not through moral considerations on good and evil that we can prevent someone to do “evil”, especially to others, but through attempts to convince him/her that what (s)he deems good for himself/him in the evil (s)he does to others, or to oneself while being mistaken on what is really good for oneself, is in fact eventually bad, directly, or more likely indirectly, for oneself. But it is not sufficient to intellectually convince him/her and to get an agreement in words, (s)he must be absolutely, deep inside, so to speak “viscerally”, convinced and ready to apply in acts what these principles imply. This vision of Man may seem pessimistic and make him a monstrous egoist for idealists believing in disinterested altruism, but it is realistic. What may overcome this egoism is the understanding that Man being by nature a “political” animal, that is, made to live in society, the properly understood interest of each one implies to take into account the others and to find a proper balance between what is good for oneself and what is good for the others, and thus to understand that ignoring the others cannot in the end be good for oneself, or at least is less good than taking them into consideration and acknowledging their own desires.

26 We could say “the light”, without being more specific, but, in the time of Plato, available “artificial” lights, all using fire one way or another, were much less powerful than those existing nowadays and the difference between seeing in the light of the sun and seeing under artificial light was such that, indeed, the only way to properly see something was to look at it in broad daylight under the light of the sun.
them, toward the good life, that is, “happiness” for each one. Its purpose is not the knowledge of what is as such, for the mere sake of knowing, but the search of what is good to lighten their path through life and guide them toward their perfection. 27 What is the most important for human beings is not to know where they come from and how the Universe around them developed from some primordial principle, but to look toward the future and always look for the best for them so as to enlighten the decisions they will make in a near and remote future. Knowledge without the light of the good, what we nowadays call “science”, can only answer “how to” questions, “how to do this or that?”, not “why”, “for what purpose”, questions, “why do this rather than that?”, which are in fact the only ones we should take interest in, since we cannot change the past, while our future, individual and collective, depends in large part on us and the decisions we make, individually and collectively.

But trying to see what surrounds us in the “light” of the good doesn’t mean trying to “look” at the good itself: in the visible realm, looking at the sun is not the best way to see what it lights, human beings around us in particular, quite the contrary since it might ruin our sight; similarly, in the intelligible realm, investigating what “the good itself” 28 might be would teach us nothing and might at best make us pseudo-philosophers having understood nothing about true “philosophy”. The idea suggested by the allegory of the cave that the contemplation of the sun itself might be the ultimate stage of the ascent of the freed prisoner is a “test” put there by Plato to see if we have properly understood what he tries to make us understand, since everybody knows full well that to “see clearly the sun itself by itself in its own space and contemplate [it] as it is”, 29 as he suggests in the allegory, is impossible for human eyes and could only make them blind. Plato, in his dialogues, never undertakes such a search and, when he focuses on the “good” in the introductive dialogue of the last tetralogy, the Philebus, it is on the good for human beings, not the good in itself. He is not looking for the “good”, even less for the (moral) “Good” with a capital “G”, in the abstract, but for what makes a good life for human beings. And he finds it in a mix providing each part of man its due, that is, just, share of “good”, a mix of material pleasure in due proportion and of intellectual satisfaction in a properly oriented use of intelligence, that is, enlightened by the “good”, turned toward the future and the search for the good life.

The purpose of human intelligence, then, is not to attempt to know what is, but what is good; it is not to focus on “being (to on)”, but on “beingness” (ousia), that is, the “value” of each

27 This is the meaning of the central section of the Theaetetus, a dialogue precisely focusing on the question of “knowledge (epistèmè)”, often presented (wrongly) as a digression portraying the “philosopher” according to Socrates and Plato: in fact, it links justice to knowledge by means of two contrasting portraits of perfectly unjust human types: the perpetual litigant for whom logos is no more than a tool to manage his own affairs to his advantage before courts to which he appeals all the time to rule on his many cases against his fellow citizens, using all the tricks of rhetoric to persuade the judges with no care whatsoever for truth but only the urge to win his cases even when he is in the wrong; and the man withdrawing from the world and ignoring his fellow citizens to spend all his time alone in his ivory tower in pseudo-philosophical ravings exploring a heaven of pure ideas without submitting them to the test of experience and testing their relevance through dialogue, who manages to appear as a “philosopher” in the eyes of “scientists” such as Theodorus of Cyrene, one of the interlocutors of the dialogue, but ends up only discreeting true “philosophy” in the eyes of the crowd.

28 In Greek, auto to agathon (see Republic VI, 506d8-e1, 507a3, 507b5).

29 Republic VII, 516b4-7.

30 In the Republic, the parallel between good and sun is precisely Socrates’ answer to his interlocutors asking him to at last say what the “good” is for him. And he refuses to answer, preferring to propose image after image: parallel between sun and good, analogy of the line, allegory of the cave. The “idea of the good” cannot be described with words, no more than any other “idea”, it is experienced through life.

31 The meaning of this probable neologism that I coin, after the model of the Greek word ousia, substantive derived from the feminine form ousa of the present participle of the verb einaí (“to be”; on is the neuter form, which I translate as “being”), from the present participle “being” of the English “to be”, will become clearer as we proceed. The usual translation by “essence”, which is the transcription in English of the neologism coined in Latin by Cicero from esse (“to be”), precisely to translate into Latin the Greek word ousia he was reading in Plato, would only cloud the issue after twenty-five centuries of commentaries of Plato and of philosophy.
“being” with regard to the good. Plato faces us, in a daunting dialogue, the Parmenides, with the emptiness of any speech on Being which has not been preceded by a reflection on the mechanics and limits of logos (“language, speech”), reflections he precisely conducts in the central dialogue of the trilogy introduced by the Parmenides and dedicated to the art of to dialegesthai, the Sophist. For him, “to be (einai)” is only a function word used to assign to a “being (on)”, that is, to a “subject”, a “beingness (ousia)”, that is, a “predicative expression”, and nothing more. Used without an explicit predicative expression, einai (“to be”) means nothing and can have a meaning only because one or more predicative expressions are implicitly assumed (“material” or “living” or “visible” or tangible” being, or on the contrary, “eternal” or “immaterial or “unchanging” as opposed to “becoming”, and so on) and it is the fact that these predicative expressions are implicit, and thus not necessarily the same for all, and, for the same speaker, not necessarily the same from one speech to the other, which makes it possible to demonstrate anything and its contrary about being with the same logical rigor, as Parmenides brilliantly shows in the dialogue named after him. It is the “light” of the good which allows us to move from “being” to ousia (“beingness”), that is, from a word which teaches us nothing since it can be applied to everything without exception (a man “is” a man, a cat “is” a cat, a word “is” a word, an idea “is” an idea, and so on) to a word which introduces the idea of “value”: indeed, the word ousia, though derived from the present participle of the verb einai (“to be”), had, in the time of Socrates and Plato, the meaning of “property, wealth, substance (in the sense of material possessions)”, implicitly importing in language the idea that we are what we own and that the “value” of a human being is his/her material wealth. Plato plays with this meaning of the word ousia to try to reorient it toward a value which is no longer material: if a human being is not one’s body, but one’s immaterial psuché (the anthrópoi of the allegory of the cave), one’s “good” cannot be a material wealth and we should search elsewhere what is really a “wealth/substance (ousia)” for him/her. And what can guide us in this quest is the idea of the good (hè tou agathou idea) since the good is in the end what we seek in all cases and material wealth (ousia in the usual sense) is but a means toward other things deemed, rightly or wrongly, “good”, while the good is never sought as a

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32 The Greeks of Plato’s time had not yet developed a grammatical “metalanguage” to describe the functions of a word in a sentence so that Plato had to use periphrases to refer to these emergent notions: thus, in certain contexts at least, to on (literally “the being”) means the grammatical subject, the x, of an expression of the form “x is a”, and hè ousia (“the beingness”) or to ti esti (literally “the what [it] is”), is the predicative expression a.

33 Translating einai as “to exist” doesn’t solve the problem and the English word “to exist” poses the same problems as “to be”: which “existence” are we talking about? A mere word “exists”, as a word. “To exist” attempts to render in English the so-called “existential” meaning of einai (“to be”), as opposed to its mere role as copula (linking verb), but precisely for Plato, there is no such meaning.

34 See note 31 above.

35 In English, the word “substance” has the two meanings ousia had in Greek, but not the link with “to be” implied in the root of ousia. It is thus weird that most recent translators prefer “essence” to “substance” to translate ousia. The reason is probably that they don’t see that Plato, far from wanting to maintain a leak-proof wall between the two meanings, the usual one (“wealth”) and the “metaphysical” one, is on the contrary playing with this dual meaning, so they want to decide in each case which meaning is relevant, either the usual one or the “metaphysical” one. A good counterexample of this is found at the beginning of the Republic, which is indeed meant to discretely introduce the reflection about the proper ousia for human beings. It takes place in the short dialogue between Socrates and his host, Cephalus, a historical character, father of the orator Lysias and of Polemarchus, another interlocutor of Socrates in the Republic, who was a rich arm dealer from Syracuseus origin, friend of Pericles, which had asked him to settle in Athens (where he was thus, along with his children, a “metis”, that is, a resident alien). In his discussion with Cephalus, an old man close to the end of his life at the time of the dialogue, Socrates, referring to the wealth (ousia) the later has acquired through arms’ sale, asks him: What greatest good (megiston agathon) do you think you have enjoyed from the fact of having acquired a great wealth (ousia) (Republic I, 330d2-3). This question suggests a connection between ousia and megiston agathon (“the greatest good”), asking between the lines what is really the greatest good for a human being and thus is one’s true ousia, one’s true and really “good” “beignness”.

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means toward something else, but always as an end.36

In short, for Plato, philosophy has no need of an ontology (speech on being), but should be an “agathology” (speech on the good, to agathon).

In the Sophist, central dialogue of the sixth tetralogy, to which the preparatory stages developed in the first five tetralogy, summarized in the Theaetetus, lead, and which, while openly trying to characterize37 the sophist, tries simultaneously, between the lines, to characterize the true “philosopher”, which is its antithesis, the unnamed stranger from Elea (the birthplace of Parmenides) which assumes leadership of the discussion in this dialogue in place of Socrates, dismissed equally all the thinkers fighting one another in speeches about “being”, those who believe only in what they can see and touch, whom he calls “sons of the earth” (tous gêgeneis, Sophist, 248c1-2), whom we would rather call nowadays “materialists”, as well as those who oppose “being (eînai)” to “becoming (gignesthai)” and admit as being only what is immaterial and unchanging, whom he calls “friends of forms/ideas” (tous tôn eidôn philous, Sophist, 248a4-5), whom we would rather call nowadays “idealists”.38

For Plato, the starting point of philosophy is an investigation on the tool it uses, logos, in order to determine if it can give us access to more than words and if that’s the case, how and within which limits. The Sophist, beyond its avowed purpose obvious from the title, is an investigation of the relations between words and the “activators”, the pragmata, which elicit them within us and the rules of meaningful speech. This is the reason why the dialogue is conducted by an anonymous stranger and starts with a question on the meaning of three words, sophistês (“sophist”), politikos (“political (leader)”) and philosophos (“philosopher”)39 which play a key role in the question I identified as the starting point of the dialogues: “who is fit to rule human beings?” In the time of Socrates, sophists had the pretense of training (in exchange of huge amounts of money which made them rich) political leaders and were viewed as philosophers by the crowd which, based on the results, couldn’t accept Plato’s Socrates claim in the Republic that the (true) “philosophers” should rule. Hence the importance of clearly distinguishing between sophists and philosophers and, both having as only “weapon” logos, to clearly distinguish between rhetoric as the

36 See Republic VI, 505d5-506a2. This is what Plato means when, in the analogy of the line, he talks about an archê anapotheton (510b7, 511b6-7), an expression clearly referring to the good (to agathon) without explicitly naming it, which should not be translated as “an unhypothetical first principle”, but paraphrased to stay as close as possible to the dual meaning of archê (whose original meaning is “what is ahead”, then “principle”, “beginning”) and to the etymological meaning of hupotheton, “put under”, as “a (guiding) principle [which is] not [itself] set to support something else”, that is, what guides us and toward which we progress (an “end”) and which is not meant to “support” our progression toward something else, to serve as a “means” in view of some further goal, which is both at the start, as “principle”, and at the end (the goal) of our activity.

37 I say “characterize” and not “define” because to think that Plato’s Socrates is looking for “definitions” in the manner of Aristotle or a dictionary is a big mistake. To think that it might be possible to adequately describe an eidos or an idea with a few words supposes a total misunderstanding of the analogy of the line, since to stay at the level of words means to stay in the first segment of the intelligible. The understanding of “concepts (eîdê/ideai)” which Plato aims at is beyond words and unutterable by definition. Thus it is not the concision in wording which can express it, but on the contrary the multiplication of expressions and examples probing its contours and limits at the borders with neighboring concepts, with the help of a vocabulary which, far from seeking a technical specialization of words, tries on the contrary to approach the same concept with different words and under different angles precisely to attempt to detach the concept from the words used to express it. This is the reason why those who think that the so-called “Socratic” dialogues (for instance the Lysis about friendship (philia), the Laches about courage (andreia), the Charmides about moderation (sôphrosunê), the Euthyphro about piety (hosiotês)) are failures show they haven’t understood the purpose of Plato in these dialogues.

38 Scholars wrongly think that Plato is on the side of the idealists, so they have a hard time understanding the critique the stranger from Elea addresses them, for they are expecting from Plato a speech on being, an “ontology”, which, for them, is the foundation of any philosophy. Thus they can’t see that what Plato is doing is precisely to put an end to this assumption that any philosophy should begin with a discussion on being and to found anew philosophy on a speech on logos, its rules, it power and its limits.

39 The case of the politikos is dealt with in the dialogue explicitly identified as the continuation of the Sophist, whose title it is (the Statesman, or Politicus, in English), where the Elean stranger once again leads the discussion.
The starting point of the stranger in this “building” of true philosophy is what I call the principle of selective associations: we are neither the parts of a big undifferentiated whole in which everything gets confused with everything else (Parmenides’ doctrine pushed to its limit) nor “monads” unable to any sort of communication with one another in a “Universe” in which nothing “mixes” with anything else, but in a “whole” in which some “beings (onta)” have “relations” with others, but not all beings all possible relations with all other beings. And words are “beings (onta)” among others, which cannot be assembled any way you’d like if you want to produce more than noise, that is, meaning, assembling words in a way consistent with the relations (expressed by verbs) they pretend to describe between subjects they pretend to point at (expressed by nouns).

The test of truth is then made though shared experience in dialogue. In the background of the presentation of the principle of selective associations is this fact, of which the stranger is quite certain based on what he knows of the doctrines of the thinkers he has in mind, without having to submit it to one more specific experience, which is that none of them, and in the end nobody, would accept the statement that “rest is the same as movement”, whatever the precise meaning each one gives to the words “rest (stasis)” and “movement (kinesis)”.41

In the application of the principle to the specific case of logos, he first states that, for a sentence to have meaning, it must associate at least a name (onomà) and a verb (rhêma), that is, a “subject” to an “action”,43 before giving two examples of minimal sentences: ‘Theaetetus sits44 (Theaitètos kathêtai, 263a2)” and “Theaetetus, with whom I myself am now dialoguing, the art of plausible and convincing speech with no care for truth, as taught by Gorgias and his likes, and the true “dialectical” art,46 the art of the dialogue capable of leading to truth, especially on the good, which is the specific art of the philosophos as conceived by Plato.

Dialektikon in Greek, transcribed in English as “dialectic”, is an adjective formed after the verb dialegesthai, meaning “to dialogue”, with the suffix -ikos indicating a manner of doing things. To be dialevtikos means to be able to practice dialogue in an efficient manner, without being trapped by words, so as to reach what is beyond them, that is, eidè and most of all ideai. When the adjective is used in the feminine with the article as a substantive, in the form hé dialevtikhè (implied technè), translated into English as “dialectic” or “dialectics”, it designates for Plato the art allowing someone to be diallektikos, that is, to reach truth through dialogue. But it is not so much a specific oratory “technique”, a specific manner of conducting a discussion based on strictly codified “methods”, as it is a disposition of the mind toward logos and words which must guide the philosophos in any search for the truth through dialogue.

This principle is introduced in the most general possible way at Sophist, 251d5-252c7, in a section where Plato keeps deliberately changing words to describe what I call “relations”, precisely to show that his explanations are all-encompassing; then it is reformulated through an example where the stranger uses five of the broadest “notions”, “being”, “same”, “other”, “rest” and “movement” (Sophist, 253b9-258c6), here again deliberately varying the words he uses to talk about what I have called “notions”, so as to accommodate all the potential interlocutors, not because, for him, these words would be synonymous, but because, in this specific context and with regard to what he wants to show, they are interchangeable. He uses alternatively the words genè (“sorts, families”), eidè (“appearances, kinds, species”), ideai (“appearances, ideas”), phusei (“natures”), or ousiai (“beingnesses”), going so far as to change words within the same sentence (thus at 257a9, he talks of “the nature of sorts (hè tôn genôn phusis)”; some of these words (phusis, derived from phuein (“to grow”)), and genos, derived from gignesthai (“to be born, to become”) referring more specifically to the material dimension of the world in becoming, others (eidos et idea) to the intelligible unchanging realm. Eventually, it is applied to the special case of words and logos (Sophist, 261d1-263d4), the stranger claiming that logos “is one of the sorts of beings (tòn ontôn hen ti genôn einia)” (Sophist, 260a5-6) and thus that the general principle applies also to these specific “beings” which words are, as building blocks of logos.

For the Greeks of Plato’s time, as can be seen in Aristotle’s works, the notion of kinesis (“movement”) was much broader than mere spatial movement and included processes such as change without spatial movement, generation and so on.

As can be seen from the first example the stranger then takes, “action” must be taken here in a broad sense including “states” implying an absence of movement. In previous examples, the stranger has shown that a list of juxtaposed names without verb, or of verbs without name, could not make up a meaningful logos.

This note in the French original is specific to the French, where no single verb exists to translate the Greek kathêtai, so that it must be translated with a combination of the French equivalent of einai (“être”, “to be in English) along with a predicate adjective (“assis”, “sitting” in English), which poses a problem in a context where...
flies (Theaitètos, hôi nun ego dialegomai, petetai, 263a9)”. Theaetetus, the interlocutor of the stranger in this dialogue, is in the best position to know that one of these two sentences says something true about him, not the other, and all the persons present, Socrates, Theodorus and the young comrade of Theaetetus also named Socrates have no trouble reaching the same conclusion. In fact, if we go one step further, taking into account the fact that this discussion never took place but is a literary creation of Plato, it is us, readers of the dialogue imagined by Plato who are quite certain that the first sentence says something, not “true”, but possible in real life circumstances similar to those the dialogue is trying to imitate, and even quite plausible in the context of this specific scene imagined by Plato, while the second says something impossible, so long as the subject is no longer simply “Theaetetus”, a name which, for us, readers, refers to nothing specific, and, since the conversation is the product of Plato’s imagination, might as well be a chimera or a griffin, but is more specifically identified as the interlocutor of the person uttering the sentence given as example, and, for that matter, as a human interlocutor, since he is capable of dialoguing with that person.

From a more general standpoint, the fact that all the interlocutors of a given conversation agree on a specific statement doesn’t prove that this statement is true, and the fact that several interlocutors don’t end up in agreement on a given statement doesn’t prove that it is false, but the lack of an agreement proves that none of the interlocutors has knowledge on the subject matter the statement deals with since, for Plato’s Socrates, what characterizes knowledge is the fact that it can be taught in a way that is convincing for all, that is, in a way which always lead to agreement, no matter who the interlocutors are. Whoever has understood the demonstration of a theorem of geometry, for instance the one used by Socrates with Meno’s young slave in the eponym dialogue, stating that the square built on the diagonal of a given square is twice in surface that of the original square, will never after change one’s mind about it and is able to “teach” it to anybody else in a convincing way, and then, and only then, that person has knowledge on this matter.

This idea of agreement, of “saying the same thing”, homologein in Greek,45 another verb derived, as is the case for dialegesthai (“to dialogue”), from the same root as logos, is key for Plato, for it is the foundation of social life, the mark of the absence of inner conflicts in the city and, whenever possible, between cities. And this homologia (“agreement”) starts with an inner agreement with oneself consisting in not changing opinion over time and putting one’s acts in agreement with one’s words. For it is impossible to reach an agreement with others when not in agreement with oneself. But what Plato experiences is that such an agreement, sign of knowledge, cannot be reached on the issue about which it would be most important for human beings to reach it, the good (to agathon), for the simple reason that most people, and even possibly all, cannot even reach an agreement with themselves on what is good for them,46 be it for lack of anticipation of the many consequences of theirs acts, or the result of a distortion of distant possible ill consequences compared to close possible pleasures, or for any other reason. And Plato thinks that this inability to reach certain, undisputable, knowledge on this question is an intrinsic limit of human nature. But if human knowledge is “knowledge” in the strongest

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45 The verb homologein (“to say (legein) the same (homos)”) is one of the most frequent verbs in the dialogues: there are 529 occurrences of it, plus 68 of compound verbs where homologein is prefixed by a prefix which doesn’t fundamentally change its meaning, only insisting on one or another aspect of the agreement, in most cases, its comprehensive or collective character (as a point of comparison, dialegesthai occurs 219 times in the dialogues). There are also 41 occurrences of the derived substantive homologia (“agreement”).

46 At Republic VI, 505d11-e4, in the prelude to the parallel between good and sun, Socrates describes the good as “that which every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does all [things], auguring it to be something, but being at a loss and unable to grasp appropriately what in the world it is and to possess a stable belief about it as about other [things], and for this very reason unable to determine about other [things] if it is something beneficial.”
sense of the word, certain and communicable knowledge, only in the light of the good, meaning that to know is to understand in what way each thing, each action, each “attribute”, each anything, is “good” for us, and we are not able to be certain about the good, then we can’t “know” anything. Hence the “I know nothing” of Plato’s Socrates: “I know, in the strongest sense of "know", nothing of what only counts as "knowledge" for me and would allow me to live a perfectly good life within the limits of what nature gave me”. To “know” a theorem of geometry, or any purely technical knowledge whose validity can be ascertained by practical experience, has no “value” whatsoever for us so long as we don’t possess the criteria allowing us to determine whether the use we could make of this “knowledge” is good for us or not.

Yet it is such a knowledge that we would like to find in leaders. For indeed, their role is to promote and maintain conditions allowing the greatest number of inhabitants of the city to be as happy as possible and to allow them to get the best from the capabilities nature has endowed them with to reach the excellence (arethè) they make possible for them. Plato is perfectly clear, especially in the work which ends the cycle of the dialogues, the Laws, on the fact that the citizens are not at the service of the City, but that the city, as the setting of their life designed by them, and thus its leaders, is at the service of the citizens to allow them to best develop their potentialities and reach their “perfection”. If Plato talks, in the Timaeus, of a World’s soul, nowhere does he talk of a “City’s soul”. The city (polis) is but a product of human beings activity at the service of human beings and the happiness of all of them, a happiness which must realize a proper balance between the happiness of the ones and the others, in the same way each one individually must realize within oneself a proper balance in the satisfaction of the needs and desires of the different parts of oneself which the different parts of one’s tripartite psuchè (“soul”), as described in the Republic and pictured in the Phaedrus through the image of the winged chariot, are: any human psuchè includes a reasoning part, the logistikon, whose tool is the logos, hence its name; a many-sided part resulting from its inhabitation in a body, geared toward the satisfaction of corporeal desires depending on choices and decisions (hunger, thirst, sexual appetite, primarily, as opposed to respiration, digestion, for instance, which take place in a reflex manner), epithumiai (“desires”, plural); and in between a part he names thumos, which represents a principle of action not grounded in reason and not resulting from corporeal needs, but stirred by symbolic representations, words or images, something like self-esteem, the sense of honor, whose affections may lead from our part to potentially violent instant reactions, in the form of heroic deeds as well as uncontrolled aggressively. The image Socrates gives of this “soul” in the Phaedrus it that of a winged chariot drawn by two horses driven by a charioteer. One of the two horses is black, spirited and stubborn, the other white and quieter, more willing to obey the instructions of the charioteer. The chariot stands for the body, the charioteer for the logistikon part of the psuchè, the black horse stands for the epithumiai (the desires) and the white horse for the thumos. The wings suggest that the human psuchè may rise toward the heavens, that is, toward the divine. Reason alone (the charioteer) cannot move the chariot/body. Only the horses can. Thus, the charioteer must manage to bring the two horses under control, especially the black one, and have them move in the same direction, the one he shows them, short of what the chariot will go nowhere and move randomly in all directions.

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47 They are not at the service of the “City” conceived as a distinct “being” which would transcend them and whose future and survival would be more important than those of the citizens individually, but they are at the service of each other in the perspective of the good of all.
48 See Republic IV, 436a8-441c3 and Phaedrus, 246a7-b4 et 253c7-e5.
49 Plato uses a plural to talk about it to show that it is in fact the gathering of a multiplicity of distinct desires, but of desires which are not properly speaking conflicting with one another, except sometimes for questions of priority (in which order satisfy them if they happen to occur simultaneously), hence the choice of Plato to look at them as a single “part”, which is nonetheless principle of multiplicity, contrary to reason, principle of unity, which, as far as it is concerned, can be in conflict with corporeal desires and restrain them, pure and simple.
The Republic as a whole describes what constitutes the ideal of this animal endowed with reason and bound to live in society which human beings (anthrôpoi), or rather, their psuchai as embodied, are, and this is justice, not justice in the narrow sense of a regulator of social relations, but justice conceived as the inner harmony of this tripartite soul (each part being “just” with the other two parts) as the foundation and prerequisite of social harmony in the city. The role of the leaders is to build the framework of this social harmony in the city through laws. This is the reason why we should choose as leaders, if not those who “know” what is really good for human beings, individually and collectively, since, as we have seen, such a knowledge is out of reach of human nature, at least those, men as well as women.50 who, at the end of a lengthy process of education and training and successive selections, have shown the greatest aptitude in the search for a better understanding of these notions, that is, have demonstrated they are “philosophers” in the sense Plato gives to this word, that is, tireless seekers of a “wisdom (sophia)” they know they will never reach in plenitude but yet lovers (philoi) of it, willing to dedicate their whole life to it in cooperation with those who are like them, to progress toward it through the sharing of experience through dialogue. And if these lovers of wisdom agree to dedicate part of their time to take charge in the government of the city, it is because they have understood that being governed by people who don’t have the required qualifications, who are less advanced than they are in the quest for wisdom, would be less good for them than accepting this burden, which they would much prefer not to have to assume if it were possible and better for them.51

That the noblest task human beings may accomplish is to organize the social life of their fellow human beings through laws is suggested through an image by the staging of the last dialogue, the Laws. This dialogue stages an old unnamed Athenian meeting with two travelers, also aged, a Cretan and a Spartan,52 who, like him, are on their way up the slopes of Mount Ida in Crete during a hot summer day to go to the cave traditionally supposed to be the place of birth of Zeus and to the neighboring temple dedicated to him. In the course of the conversation, we learn that the Cretan has been charged by Cnossos, his native city, to found a new colony and to draw laws for it. The rest of the ascent is the occasion for the three old men, under the leadership of the Athenian, to do this legislative work. At first sight, nothing there to be much excited about so long as we have not noticed that Cnossos was the city of king Minos, and that Minos, who was said to be son of Zeus, was, according to tradition, the first king to rule wisely with the help of laws and that, according to a tradition the old Athenian refers to in the first lines of the dialogue, he used to go every nine years consult his father, precisely where the three interlocutors of the dialogue are going, to have Zeus dictate him those wise laws through which he would govern his people. If we further notice that the first words of the dialogue ask the question whether the laws of human cities are made by men or by a god, we come to realize that what Plato wants us to understand through this staging is precisely that men shouldn’t count on gods to organize their life, but only on themselves and that it is when they take part in this legislative work that they rise toward the

50 Plato, ahead of his time on this issue at least, devotes several pages of the Republic to explaining that women should not be excluded a priori from the functions of leaders, in fact from any function needed by the city to function properly (he focuses on the task of “guardians”, that is, of defenders of the city, among which the leaders are chosen), but that all these functions must be attributed based on the required skills at the end of an appropriate training, skills that may be found among women as well as among men since both are anthrôpoi and the only difference between men and women is the specific role they play in the generation of children.

51 See Republic 1, 347b5-d2. Socrates, at this point, at the beginning of the dialogue, doesn’t speak yet of philosophoi, but simply of hoi agathoi (“the good ones”). But when we know, at the end of the dialogue, that the “good ones” are the philosophoi, the statement remains valid for them.

52 Plato associates this way the three major places of ancient Greece: Crete, traditionally considered the birthplace of political regimes based on laws, Sparta and Athens, the two cities which, in the time of Plato, were fighting one another for the leadership of the Greek world.
Plato: the Essentials

divine, as physically do the three travelers climbing toward the cave of Zeus, and thus “deify” themselves. The divine “gift”, if divine gift there is, is not laws dictated by gods, but reason, of which human beings are endowed, which should allow them to conceive themselves laws for their cities, taking the order (kosmos) of the Universe they are a part of and which obeys “laws” established by the demiurge (dèmiourgos)53 who created it as a model. This is the reason why the last trilogy, which ends with the Laws, opens with the Timaeus, which develops, in what its author, Timaeus, describes himself as a “likely myth”, a compendium of the physical science of the time, staging this “demiurge” and his work of creation. This dialogue suggests, within the myth, three possible understandings of Man: a purely material understanding which might be that of a “physicist”, in which Man is no more than a bunch of “atoms” as everything else in the created Universe54 (the “material cause” of Aristotle); an understanding which might be that of a “biologist”, through the description of the “pattern” of the human being built by secondary gods to host the human psuchè manufactured by the demiurge, a pattern in which everything is designed to allow this soul, or rather its part endowed with logos, the logistikion, to fully play its role (the “formal cause” of Aristotle, who sees the psuchè as the “form (eidos) of Man); an understanding which might be that of a “psychologist” through the description of the building of Man’s psuchè by the demiurge (the “moving cause” of Aristotle, since the soul is defined by Plato as what moves the body). But before the myth, that is, before the creation of time as “a moving image of eternity”55 and of space, he suggests a fourth understanding, which is in fact the first in the order of the dialogue,56 through a reminder of the themes of the Republic, of the themes and not of the dialogue itself, since what is reminded there is another conversation, supposed to have taken place the day before the conversation reported in the Timaeus, between the same interlocutors as those of the Timaeus, thus interlocutors different from those of the Republic, in a different location (Athens rather than Piraeus), at a different date (each dialogue alludes to a festival during which the dialogue is supposed to take place and it is a different festival in each case, Bendideia for the Republic, Panathenaic Games for the Timaeus). What is thus brought to mind in the Timaeus is, indirectly, the idea of justice introduced and analyzed in the Republic, dissociated from its material context and outside the myth of the Timaeus, so as to better make us understand that it is an idea outside space and time, and that this idea of justice is the ideal of Man in this life, what (s)he should strive for (the “final cause” of Aristotle), his/her “end (telos)” which, being outside space and time, is already there before the “creation” depicted in the myth, as is suggested by the fact that it is on this reminder that the dialogue opens.

The answer to the question asked at the beginning of the cycle, “who is fit to lead one’s fellow human beings?”, is given at the center of the central dialogue of the central trilogy, at Republic, V, 473c11-d6: “Unless either the philosophers become kings in the cities or those who are nowadays called kings and rulers get to philosophizing truly and adequately, and this falls together upon the same person, political power and philosophy, while the many natures of those who are driven toward the one apart from the other are forcibly set aside, there will be no cessation of evils, my dear Glaucon, for cities, nor, methinks, for the human race” and this same

53 Dèmiourgos means etymologically “working for the people”, that is “craftsman”.
54 This understanding is provided in the Timaeus through what might be considered the first mathematical model of matter, in which the four basic element from which everything is built (air, water, earth and fire) are themselves built from triangles, that is forms. This model makes us laugh nowadays owing to it lack of “scientific” relevance, but it should be noted that its author doesn’t take himself/it too seriously since he himself calls it a “myth”, and besides, that its purpose was not to develop a “scientific” (in the modern sense) understanding of matter making it possible for us to act on it, but to present a finalist approach of this creation inspirational for our work of lawmakers striving for the good. Thus, what mattered for him was to account for the order (kosmos) and harmony of the Universe through images and symbols.
55 See Timaeus, 37d5.
56 As a matter of fact, in the dialogue, the four understandings are introduced in the reverse order of the one I use here to present them.
dialogue details the training program and the rule of life of such a person, justice, understood as does Socrates, as and ideal for both inner and social life. The Sophist draws between the lines the portrait of the philosopher worthy of that name, which is not the completely unjust pseudo-philosopher depicted at the center of the Theaetetus, and provides the instructions for use of his/her working tool, logos. The Statesman, which comes next, theorizes the action of such a philosopher—king and the last tetralogy shows him going back down into the cave through an example of his/her practical activity given in the Laws. But this answer was already present between the lines ever since the first trilogy, exploring in dialogues whose interlocutors are teenagers, thus at a level suitable for beginners, the building blocks of the expression philosophos anér (“philosophic man”) used by Theorodus in the Sophist to introduce the stranger from Elea which replaces Socrates to “kill” in thought his fellow citizen Parmenides in what he himself calls a “parricide”, so as to get philosophy out of the rut of ontology: the Lysis deals with philia (“friendship”), the Charmides, not yet with sophia, but more modestly with teenagers, with its version for kids, sôphrosunè (“soundness of mind, moderation”), and, in between, the Laches deals with andreia (“courage/manhood”), the fact of being an anér, a “man/male”.50

And if all this educational program for “philosopher-kings” is developed by Plato in the form of dialogues, it is, in quite a consistent way with what he is trying to make us understand through them, because dialogue is the birthplace of logos and the only way at our disposal, as human beings, to put to the test the relevance of our words and their adequacy to what they purport to describe. Plato doesn’t ask us to take at face value all he has is Socrates, the Elean stranger or the old Athenian of the Laws say, but to enter in dialogue with them and their interlocutors and to dare take side in their debates. This way of proceeding is that which seemed to him closest to an actual dialogue, which is the only way to practice philosophia. At the beginning of the Statesman, Socrates suggests that, after a dialogue between him and Theaetetus (the Theaetetus, on “knowledge (epistêmê)”), followed, the next day, with the same participants plus the Elean stranger brought along by Theodorus, by a dialogue between the stranger and Theaetetus on the theme of the sophist (the Sophist) and a dialogue between the stranger and young Socrates on the theme of the statesman (the Statesman), a final dialogue might take place between himself and

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57 The allegory of the cave doesn’t end with the contemplation of the sun. Socrates then describes the return of the freed prisoner into the cave, necessary if only to allow him/her a validation through dialogue of the result of his/her solitary exploration of the intelligible outside the cave.

58 This “parricide” in thought of Parmenides by a single one of his fellow citizens is the counterpart in the intelligible realm of the “murder” in acts of Socrates by a plurality of his fellow citizens in the visible/sensible realm related in the Apology. These two executions, the one in the visible, the other in the intelligible, may be seen as the two foundational events of Plato’s thought. The plan of the tetralogies as I understand it unfolds along the lines of the analogy of the line: two tetralogies (the second and third) explore the two segments of the visible, two (the fifth and sixth) the two segments of the intelligible, on each side of a central tetralogy focusing on the psychê, in between an introductory tetralogy (the first, stating the problem to be addressed) and a concluding tetralogy (the seventh) giving leads on how to put what has been uncovered in practice. The condemnation to death of Socrates related in the Apology, central dialogue of the second trilogy of the visible, is the key event in the visible realm, and the parricide of Parmenides, related in the Sophist, the central dialogue of the second trilogy of the intelligible, is the key event in the intelligible realm.

59 Sophia is not totally absent from the dialogue, even if the word is seldom used, since it is the implied topic of the discussion in the second part of the dialogue, which is between Socrates and Critias.

60 Andreia is derived from the root andr- of the word anér (“man” as opposed to “woman (gynê)”, that is, “male”), found in the other inflectional forms of the word, whose genitive is andros. The word andreia means “courage”. “Manhood” would be an apt counterpart in English and “virility” its counterpart on Latin roots, vir being the Latin counterpart of anér. Plato is not trapped by the “machismo” underlying this understanding of courage as a quality specific of males, since he admits, as we have seen, women even among the guardians (that is the potential warriors) and leaders. But he had to make do with the vocabulary at his disposal.

61 See Statesman, 258a3-6.

62 Socrates, Théodorus of Cyrene and two of his young students, Theaetetus, which, we are told, physically, that is, in the visible realm, resembles Socrates (Theaetetus, 143c7-9), and another teenager friend of Theaetetus, also named Socrates, and thus resembles him by name, that is, in the intelligible realm.
his young namesake, without saying what this ultimate dialogue might be about. Since, at the beginning of the *Sophist*, Socrates suggested that the stranger explain how his fellow citizens\(^ {63}\) understand the three words “sophist”, “statesman” and “philosopher” and what their opinion is about these types, all scholars deduce from this that this last dialogue should have dealt with the philosopher and assume Plato had in mind an extra dialogue called the *Philosopher*, which would have been lost or never written, not seeing that the philosopher is also the theme of the *Sophist*, but that it is to the reader to figure that out. \(^ {64}\) The young Socrates who should dialogue with the old Socrates is in fact the reader of the dialogues and their dialogue is the one Plato hopes the reader to conduct while reading all the dialogues of the cycle, and what Socrates invites us to do through this remark is to read anew all the earlier dialogues in the light of what is about to be said in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*. The *Philosopher* has indeed been written by Plato and has not been lost: it is the whole set of the twenty-eight dialogues.

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\(^ {63}\) It is important to note that Socrates doesn’t ask the stranger what his personal opinion is, but what is that of his fellow citizens from Elea (hoi peri ton ekei topon, “the [people] of this place out there”, *Sophist*, 217a1), that is, an opinion, an understanding of these words resulting from dialogue and “reflecting” (see the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave) a collective understanding.

\(^ {64}\) Anyway, since it is to the stranger that Socrates asked the opinion of his fellow citizens on the sophist, the statesman and the philosopher, a dialogue between both Socrates on the theme of the philosopher would not answer the original question!

The clearest indication that the *Sophist* also deals with the philosopher is given in interrogative form at *Sophist*, 253c7-9, when the stranger, talking about the dialectical science (hè dialektikè epistèmè), says: “Or by Zeus have we unwittingly stumbled upon the science befitting free [men] and chanced to find the philosopher while looking for the sophist?” It is up to the reader to answer this question.
Appendix 1: the structure of Plato’s dialogues

The array below synthesizes the tetralogical structure which I contend Plato had in mind while composing his dialogues.

### Prelude

- **epithumiai** (desires)
- **phusis** (nature)
- **krisis** (judgment)
- **logos** (reason)

### Trilogy

- **thumos** (self-esteem)
- **krisis** (judgment)
- **kosmos** (order)

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**Note:** the Greek words chosen to characterize tetralogies 2, 3, 5 and 6, respectively eikasia, pistis, dianoiai and noësis/epistémè are those used by Plato’s Socrates to name the four pathémata (“affections”) identified in the analogy of the line at the end of book VI of the Republic (for the last one, he uses the word noësis in the analogy and replaces it by epistémè in the reminder of the analogy toward the end of book VII, where he uses noësis for the two pathémata of the intelligible taken together opposed to doxa (“opinion”) for the two pathémata of the visible taken together). The Greek words chosen to characterize the three levels in the trilogies, epithumiai, thumos and logos, are those associated with the three parts of the soul (psuchè) as described in book IV of the Republic. These two partitions, structure of the psuchè (“soul”) for the organization of the trilogies and identification of its various pathémata for the ordering of the tetralogies, structure the whole cycle of the dialogues, whose backbone, the central tetralogy, precisely focuses on the psuchè.
Appendix 2: lexicon of Greek words important for understanding Plato
(Revised and enriched version of February 28, 2021)

I have included in this lexicon words particularly important in the dialogues, but I’m not trying to look for a “technical” meaning that these words might have for Plato, but on the contrary to explore the range of meanings of each word since Plato, even when he “specializes” a word in a specific context, never loses sight of the other possible meanings of the word (see for instance the case of ousia), precisely to be able to play with it on occasion. This is what makes the translation into English (or any other language) difficult since in most cases, no English word candidate for the translation of one or another meaning of a Greek word has the same range of meanings, which leads to losing some or all of the overtones Plato is playing with. This is why, in the above paper, I keep some Greek words, even at the cost of giving one of its possible translations between parentheses, or on the contrary to use an English word followed by the Greek word it purports to translate. The most obvious example of this difficulty is the case of the Greek word logos, for which each specialized translation into English based on context suppresses the many overtones the word had in Greek. In fact, one way of describing Plato’s dialogues is to see them as a lengthy reflection on logos as what distinguishes human beings from all other animals: what is logos, how does it work, what does it allow us to grasp beyond the words it is made up of and of what use might it be to help us live our lives of human beings? Thus Plato doesn’t want the least to fix a unique and precise meaning for each word, but tries on the contrary to play with the flexibility, vagueness and ambiguity of language to help us go beyond words to reach what they somehow attempt to point at. But this doesn’t mean he is not careful in choosing his words, far from it, whether to keep using a specific word in a given context or on the contrary to deliberately vary his vocabulary when he doesn’t want a given word to become “technical” by specialization. Two examples will make this clearer.

In the allegory of the cave, Socrates says about the chained anthropoi that they are capable of dialegesthai (“dialogue”, Republic VII, 515b4) and that, as a result, they give names to the shadows they see moving in front of them, on the other hand, about the anthropoi hidden behind the wall and bearing statues and artefacts showing above the wall, he says that some of them talk, using the verb phtheggesthai (515a2, 515b8, 515b9). This verb may mean “to talk” when the subject is an human being, but it has a much broader sense, and can be used about animals and even about things in the general sense of “to make a noise”. This way, Plato makes a difference between the anthropoi as thinking beings capable of knowledge (the prisoners), who produce a logos having meaning and dialogue with one another, and the anthropoi as objects of knowledge (the bearers behind the wall in the cave), whose speeches are only, as physical phenomena in the sensible world depicted by the interior of the cave, noises among other. And what proves that this is not merely a stylistic device and a random choice to avoid monotony is that he reuses three times the verb phtheggesthai, always about the bearers, including twice in the same sentence within a few words. But when one of the prisoners is freed and a conversation ensues with one of those who freed him, he returns to the verb legein (root of logos, 515d2). Thus, Plato makes a clear distinction between speech as an audible physical phenomenon (“noises”) and speech as intelligible (a logos) and chooses the appropriate verb depending on which viewpoint on speech he wants to stress in each case (this distinction is indeed not limited to the allegory of the cave and, in most cases, when Plato uses the verb phtheggesthai about human beings in the dialogues, it is to refer to speech as an acoustic phenomenon). On the contrary, when, in the Sophist, the stranger examines possible combinations of five notions he has taken as examples (being, same, different, rest, movement, Sophist, 253b9-258c6) and wants his reasoning to assume no prior “ontology” and be acceptable to “sons of the earth” as well as “friends of eidé” and having the broadest possible bearing, to name from a generic standpoint what may “partake” in certain “mixes” but not in others, he deliberately keeps changing vocabulary, using at times words appealing to the sons of the earth, phusis (“nature”, derived from the verb phuein meaning “to grow”) and genos (“family, kind”, derived from the verb gignesthai, meaning “to be born, to become”), at times words more likely to please “friends of eidé”, eidôs itself and idea, at still other times a more neutral word which might satisfy both, ousia (“beingness”). And this doesn’t mean that to him, these words are synonymous, but that the principle he is presenting works no matter which one of these words is chosen and what the exact meaning assumed for it is. Whether one thinks of rest and movement as “natures (phusei)”, “kinds (gene)”, “appearances (eidê)”, “ideas (idea)” or “beingnesses (ousia)”, whether a materialist (“son of the earth”) or an idealist (“friend of eidé”), and whatever the meaning assumed for “rest (stasis)” and “movement (kinesis)”, no one can accept that “rest is the same as movement” and everybody would accept that “rest is different from movement”, which is enough to prove that words cannot be assembled any way one wants and that there is an “externality” imposing its law upon language for it to have meaning and say the “truth (alètheia)”.

Agathos (adjective; neuter agathon): “good” in all the senses of the word, physical as well as moral; the neuter form used with the article as a substantive, to agathon, is used by Plato to designate “the good” as what gives value to everything, not limited to some sort of moral Good with a capital “G”, since for him, there is a “good” of the body as well as a “good” of the soul, and indeed of each part of the soul, desires as well as reason. In the plural, ta agatha refers to the multiplicity of “good things/attitudes/actions/thoughts/…”, that is, to all the instances of
whatever may be said to be “good”. For Plato, *agathon* is to the intelligence what the sun (and more generally, light) is to sight, to the extent that any human being always seeks what is good for him/her in all his actions, not as a means toward something else, but as an end, and that intelligence is given human beings to reach this goal.

**Aletheia** (noun): “truth”. The word is a substantive derived from the adjective *alethēs*, whose etymological meaning is “not hidden”, “unveiled”. The path toward truth, pictured in the allegory of the cave, is thus a progressive “unveiling” (the shadows of the statues, then the statues, then the shadows and reflections of *anthrōpoi*, then the *anthrōpoi* themselves, seen in the light of the sun/“good”), each step leading to a richer and more comprehensive apprehension of human beings, without getting rid of what had been perceived in the previous steps, but putting it in a different perspective and adding new insight. The tool for this unveiling in the human beings that we are is *logos* an thus, in this perspective, truth is a property of *logos*, the fact for it of “[saying] beings as it is” (λέγειν *ta onta hōs estin*, Sophist, 263b4), that is, to reflect through relations established by a *logos* between the words it uses the relations between the beings that these words pretend to refer to.

**Anēr** (noun; gen. *andros*, pl. *andres*): “man” as opposed to “woman (γυνḗ)”, that is, taking into account the sexual difference between male and female.

**Andreia** (noun): this word, derived from *anēr*, means “courage” in a perspective where courage can only be displayed in warrior’s fight and thus can only be a masculine virtue. A translation reflecting this bias is “manhood”, or “virility”, which is the counterpart of *andreia* on Latin roots, since *vir* is the Latin equivalent of *anēr*.

**Anupotheton** (adjective): this adjective is probably a neologism coined by Plato to qualify, in the analogy of the line at the end of book VI of the *Republic*, the “principle (*archē*, see this word)” toward which the process associated with the second segment of the intelligible, the one leading to true “knowledge”, must ascend. This word is formed by adding a privative alpha to an adjective derived from the aorist form of the verb *hupothēnai*, whose etymological meaning is “to put under”. Thus, *anupotheton* etymologically means “not put under” and not “unhypothetical”, a transcription rather than translation sometimes used to render it in English, but which has the defect of importing the usual meaning “hypothetical” has taken in English, that of “uncertain”. What Plato means when qualifying the principle he is talking about as *anupotheton* is that it is not stated to serve as a support to reach something else, as a “step” to reach higher, but that it is a principle beyond which there is nothing more to try to reach by “climbing” upon it. If we also notice that the word used by Plato to refer to what I have called a “principle”, *archē* (see this word) may refer both to what is ahead and toward which we move and what is at the origin, we may look at this *archē* as both a principle, but a principle which is not only at the origin but also sets a direction, that is, a *leading* principle, and the direction it points toward, the *end* (*telos*) it leads toward. This principle, though Plato does not explicitly say so, is obviously to *agathon*, which, as the ultimate *end* sought by all human beings, is indeed *anupotheton* in the sense I just described.

**Anthrōpos** (noun; pl. *anthrōpoi*): “man” as a species, as opposed to “animal” or “god”, independent of sex, that is, “human being”. In Greek the word may be used indifferently with the masculine or feminine article, without change of ending.

**Archē** (noun): substantive derived from the verb *archein*, whose primary meaning is “to lead/show the way”, and from there, “take the lead, begin” leading to the meaning “be a leader, rule, govern, command”. From these various senses of *archein*, the various senses of *archē* are derived, either “beginning, origin, principle”, or “command, sovereignty, power”. But the problem with this word is that there occurs in our understanding, or at least in the images it suggests, a reversal which ends up completely distorting this understanding. Starting from the idea, implied by the original meaning of the verb *archein*, of someone before us, walking ahead and showing the way, whom we follow, or of something before us which is a goal toward which we progress, we end up, through the idea of beginning taking the place of that of “first” in order, that is, ahead of us, then of principle and eventually of origin, to the image of something which is at the start and which we move away from and eventually which is behind us. When Plato, in the analogy of the line, mentions an *archē* *anupotheton*, we should understand *archē* in all its range of meanings: at the same time a first principle of action, a leading principle which orients our action and eventually the goal which guides us and toward which we move.

**Aretē** (noun): this word is often translated into “virtue”, which gives it too exclusively moral a connotation which it doesn’t have in Greek, where it has quite broad a range of uses, not only about human beings, but also about animals, plants and eventually almost anything: the *aretē* of something is what makes this thing best in what it is intended for, what constitutes its “excellence”. Thus, there is a close relationship between *aretē* and *agathon* (“good”): *aretē* is what makes what the word applies to “good (agathon)” to the highest possible degree for what it is meant to do, for its end/purpose. *Aretē* is the central theme of the *Meno*, which opens on a question of Meno asking Socrates if, in his opinion, human *aretē* can be taught, or results from experience, or is a gift of nature or still something else.
Autos (pronoun; fem. autē, neuter auto): this pronoun, which may have different meanings depending upon how it is used in a phrase, including “self/onself” and “by oneself/itself” when it is immediately preceded by the article, and be used in certain contexts as a personal pronoun (“he, she, it”), is particularly important in Plato in two specific grammatical constructs. In expressions taking the form autos ho *** or ho *** autos (masculine), autē hē *** or hē *** autē (feminine), auto to *** or to, *** auto (neuter), translated into “the *** himself”, “the *** herself” or “the *** itself”, sometimes reinforced by kathē hauto meaning “in/by himself/herself/itself, as such”, it purports to insist on the fact that what we are talking about is *** (for instance “the good” or “the just” or “man” or “the bed”) in itself and not the appearance (eidos/idea) it takes for us through our senses and intelligence (nous) expressed by means of words and logos, in short, the pragma (“thing”, see this word) which is at the origin of the pathēmata (“affections”) felt by our senses and intelligence in its presence. When, at Republic VII, 516a5-8, Socrates opposes the « view » by the mind of the prisoner outside the cave of men and the other things through their (intelligible) “shadows” and “reflections” to the “sight”, again by the mind, of the auto, which constitutes the final goal of the progression outside the cave regarding what was present inside, this auta refers to “things” themselves no longer seen through visible (inside the cave) or intelligible (outside the cave) shadows and reflections, that is, through their visible appearance (the shadows inside the cave) or their description through words (the shadows and reflections outside the cave). These auta are described by Socrates in the myth of the winged chariot of the Phaedrus (Phaedrus, 247b-248b) as “the colorless, formless, impalpable beingness really being” (hē achrômatos te kai aschèmatistos kai anaphēs ouσia ontōs ouσa; Phaedrus, 247c6-7) and are said to reside on the other side of the vault of heaven, in a place “above the heavens” (huperouranios) accessible only to gods and where only a few human souls having made efforts to follow one or another of these gods may hope to catch a glimpse of them from afar, without being able to move on the other side of the vault of heaven, which suggests that to apprehend them as they are is not within the power of the human soul.

Besides, the form tauton, contraction of the neuter substantive form to auto, used in the sense of “the same”, is the form used by the Eleean Stranger in the Sophist to designate one of the five “very large families” (megista genê), along with to on “(being)”, thateron (contraction of to heteron, “the other/the different”), kinesis (“move ment/change”) and stasis (“rest/changelessness”), of which he analyzes the mutual relations, and by Timaeus who makes it one of the components of the soul, along with to heteron/thateron “(the other)” and ouσia “(beingness)” (Timaeus, 35a, sq.). Speaking in this way of “same” and “other” as components of the soul, Plato wants us to understand that the power that human beings have to develop a logos in order to dialogue (dialogesthai) with one another stems from the ability that the human mind has to discern “sameness” and “otherness”, that is, resemblance and difference, in perceptions of their senses and mind allowing them to give names to “families” (genê) distinct from one another identified on the basis of resemblances justifying the attribution of an eidos (see this word) common to all members of any one of those families (see Republic VII, 515b4-5).

Daimôn (nom): in Homer, “god” ; after Homer, this word ends up designating semi-divine beings inferior to the gods strictly speaking (theoi, plural of theos), but the translation into “demon” (one of the English word derived from it, along with “daemon” and “daemon”) is misleading after twenty centuries of Christianity because the word, in the time of Plato, had no negative bias whatsoever suggesting it applied exclusively to evil creatures (hence the English variants “daimon” and “daemon”, which don’t have such a bias). In the myth of Er which ends the Republic, Socrates presents the souls about to reincarnate choosing each a daimôn associated with a specific pattern of life and who will oversee them during their whole new life (Republic X, 617e). When talking about the divine sign which sometimes stops him from doing something, he uses the expression daimonion ti (“something divine”), using the adjective daimonios derived from daimôn (see for instance Apology, 31c8-d1).

Demiourgos (noun): etymologically, “one doing some task (ergon) for the people (demos)”. In the usual sense, “craftsman”. It is the word Plato uses in the Timaeus to describe the creator of the Universe, the one introducing order (kosmos) in it to make it a Cosmos. This is what explains the meaning of the word “diemiurge” derived from it.

Dialogesthai (verb): verb derived from the middle form legesthai of legein (“to talk”), also at the root of logos (see this word), with the adjunction of the prefix dia-, meaning “through, among, in the midst of, throughout, by, between”. Dialogesthai means “talk with one another, dialogue”. This verb, or rather the activity it describes plays a major role in Plato’s thought since it is the dialogesthai which makes logos possible and provides the means of putting its relevance to the test. But, above all, it refers to the activity most characteristic of man (anthrōpos), animal (zōion, that is, living being geared toward action, as implied by life) designed to live in communities (poli tikos, implied by dia-, meaning “one with another”) and endowed with logos (logikos, implied by -logesthai), not that it suffice to talk with others to be a man worthy of that name, but because it is by best practicing this activity, thus in being most properly dialekktikos, that is, knowledgeable in the art of dialogesthai, in other words, most capable of telling (legein/legesthai) being as it is in the light of the good (to agathon), that he will be most perfectly anthrōpos (man in the sense of "human being"), and thus, most apt to govern his fellow-men toward what is best for them, individually and collectively.
Dialektikos (adjective; pl. dialektikoi): this is the adjective derived from dialegesthai to describe one who is versed in the art of dialegesthai, the ability to use logos within the framework of dialogos (“dialogue”) in an efficient way making it possible to reach truth without being trapped by words and the tricks of rhetoric. Used as a substantive under the feminine form hé dialéktikē (sc. technē), it refers to the practice of one who is dialéktikos (see for instance Republic, VII, 534e3), and is diversely described as a poreia (journey, course) (Republic VII, 532b4), a methodos (investigation, pursuit, method) (Republic VII, 533c7) or an epistēmē (knowledge) (Sophist, 253d2). The usual translation as "dialectic" is misleading, especially after Hegel and Marx among others, in so far as this word has taken in English connotations which have nothing to do with what Plato had in mind in using it.

Dialogos (noun): rather than the noun, rare in the dialogues (9 occurrences only in all the dialogues), Plato prefers the expression to dialegesthai, making a substantive of the verb by adding a neuter article in front of the infinitive (literally “the [fact of] dialoguing”), which stresses the fact that it is an activity being practiced over time, while the noun describes this activity as such without reference to time.

Dianoësthai (verb): verb derived from nous (see this word) through the verb noein, which describes the activity of the nous and means “to perceive by the mind, think, reflect, conceive”. The addition of the prefix dia- does not fundamentally change the meaning, introducing only the idea of a progress “through” thoughts occurring in turn and leading to one another, and the move to the middle (noeîthai in place of noein) stresses the fact that the subject is personally involved in the action, which takes place within one’s own mind. In the Theaetetus, Socrates defines to dianoësthai (“the [fact of] thinking”) as “a speech (logos) that the soul itself conducts from beginning to end with itself on what it examines” (Theaetetus, 189e6-7), suggesting that even thought is dependent on words.

Dianoia (noun): this is the name of activity derived from the verb dianoësthai. The stranger from Elea, in the Sophist, defines dianoia in the following way: “Thus dianoia and logos are the same: except that the inner dialogue (dialogos) of the soul with itself without the production of sound, this very [thing] has been called by us dianoia (“thought”) [...] On the other hand, the flux coming from it through the mouth accompanied by noise is called logos” (Sophist, 263e3-8). This definition is close enough to the definition of dianoësthai given by Socrates in the Theaetetus (see previous entry), with the difference that the stranger defines simultaneously logos and dianoia while Socrates, after having defined to dianoësthai as a logos of the soul with itself, later suggests as one possible definition of logos “the [fact of] making clear one’s own dianoia through sound by means of verbal expressions and words” (Theaetetus, 206d1-2), thus ending in a vicious circle (dianoia is a kind of logos, which is a way of expressing dianoia).

Dianoia is also the name Socrates gives to the pathēma (see this word) associated with the first segment of the intelligible in the analogy of the line at the end of book VI of the Republic, the one indeed where we stay prisoner of words.

Dikè (noun): “justice”. In its primary meaning, dike designates the “custom/usage” determining the “manner of behaving”, and thus “justice” as the respect of this usage; from this primary meaning stem a series of meanings designating, depending upon the context, everything revolving around what serves to enforce justice, leading to the meanings of “lawsuit, trial”, “tribunal, court of law”, “judgment”, and lastly “penalty, atonement, satisfaction”. When written with a capital « D » , Dikè designates Justice personified.

Dikaios (adjective): “just”. This is the adjective derived from dikè. As a substantive in the expression to dikaios, it designates “the just” as what one who wants to be just must seek to accomplish. The subtitle of the Republic is peri dikaios (“about the just”) and the purpose of Plato in this dialogue is to make us understand through the voice of Socrates that justice is not only a social virtue regulating relations between people, but also an “inner” virtue regulating relations between the various parts of the soul uncovered in the dialogue (see the entry about psuchē). It is in the end inner harmony of the tripartite soul as a prerequisite for social harmony between souls. Socrates also talks about justice as the health of the soul. As such, it may be regarded as the “idea(l)” (idea) of the incarnate soul and, since Socrates considers that “the soul is man” (Alcibiades, 130c6), as the “idea(l)” (idea) of Man.

Dikaiosunē (noun): “justice”. Noun formed by adding to the adjective dikaios (“just”) the suffix -sunē referring to the quality implied by the suffixed adjective. Dikaiosunē is the quality, the “virtue” of a person seeking to dikaios (“the just”) in one’s behavior. At Republic IV, 433a8-9, Socrates defines justice as the fact of “doing one’s own business and not be a meddlesome busybody”, a definition which must be understood in the light of what was said earlier on the origin of cities: man is an animal meant to live in society, which allows him to develop a logos; the framework of social life is the polis (“City/State”), built under the assumption that distributing tasks among individuals is more efficient than letting each one take care of all one’s needs (food, clothing, housing...) and should lead to a more pleasant life for all. Thus, the duty of each politēs (“citizen”), especially toward one’s fellow-citizens, is to accomplish the task which was assigned to him in the sharing of tasks and to let the others take care of their own, since, in principle, the sharing has been made taking into account each one’s capabilities, be they a gift of nature or the result of adequate training building upon natural predispositions. This definition does
not contradict the one I gave in the previous entry when talking about inner harmony as foundation for social harmony: social harmony is precisely the fact that each one properly plays one’s part in the organization of the city and the prerequisite for this is that he be able in the first place to keep at their proper place each part of one’s soul.

**Doxa** (noun): name of activity derived from the verb *dokein* meaning “to think (in the sense this verb has in a phrase such as “I think you are right”), pretend, suppose”. *Doxa* is “opinion” as opposed to knowledge (*epistêmê*). But opinion is not necessarily wrong, it only lacks the line of reasoning which might make it certain and no longer open to change. The end of the *Meno* focuses on a comparison between knowledge and true/right opinion (*alethê̂s/ orthê̂ doxa*) after the experiment with Meno’s slave boy on a theorem of geometry (the doubling of a square) has *experimentally* shown the difference between opinion (the first answer of the slave, which Socrates has no difficulty proving wrong) and knowledge (the knowledge of the one having understood the demonstration of the theorem used as an example, who will never again change one’s mind on the issue), and Socrates, once again based on experience, forces Meno, a pragmatic who has no interest in abstract speculations, to admit that, from the mere standpoint of results, there is no difference between knowledge and right opinion, using the example of the road to Larissa (a comparison between a guide knowing the road to Larissa and another one who, not knowing it, nonetheless leads travelers there), an example which, with Meno as the interlocutor, takes a peculiar flavor: indeed, Meno is a historical character who was in command of a contingent of Thessalian soldiers from Larissa who joined the army several Greek cities had decided to send in Asia Minor to support Cyrus the Younger in his attempt to oust his brother Artaxerxes from the throne of Persia; Xenophon accompanied this army and he relates the story of this expedition in his work, the *Anabasis*, and what he relates is how, after the battle of Cunaxa, where Cyrus was killed, and the capture and execution of the Greek generals by the Persians (except Meno, who might have helped the Persians capture the Greek generals after the battle playing the middle man in the organization of negotiations), he took the lead of the Greek soldiers and managed to bring them back to Greece in what is known as the Retreat of the Ten Thousand, finding the way home in hostile territory, without maps, over several thousand miles; and what Xenophon did, to find the way to Athens without knowing it, is what Meno should have done, and didn’t do, to bring back to Larissa the soldiers he was in charge of. Thus, it is based on an *actual* experience involving the road to Larissa, that of Xenophon, that Plato’s Socrates *proves* that right opinion is as good as knowledge from the standpoint of results (Socrates is supposed to dialogue with Meno before the Retreat of the Ten Thousand, since Meno stayed in Persia, trying to win the favor of the Persian general Tissaphernes, but ended up in jail and died within the year after the battle of Cunaxa, but all the readers of Plato’s dialogue, written years after these events, knew the story of Xenophon).

When, recalling the analogy of the line toward the end of book VII of the *Republic* (*Republic* VII, 533e7-534a8), Socrates associates *doxa* (“opinion”) to the two segments of the visible and *noesis* (“thought”, see this word) to the two segments of the intelligible, he does not mean to suggest that the material and sensible world is open only to opinion (*doxa*) and that only the “world” of pure intelligible beings not perceptible through senses (the beautiful, the just, the good…) is open to thought (*noesis*), but that there are two ways of envisioning what senses can grasp, either as exclusively sensible (and thus constantly changing) and this can only lead to opinions about them, or as open to intelligibility with the help of *logos* and, thinking (*noein*) about them this way, one might get a chance to make them intelligible (*noêta*) and to understand them (with no guarantee though to reach that point). And conversely, one may refuse, as the “sons of the earth” (materialists) of the *Sophist* do (see *Sophist*, 246a8-b3 and, for the expression “son of the earth” (*gênê̂nès*), *Sophist*, 248c2), to consider that purely abstract notions such as “beautiful”, “good”, “just” and so on, are “something” (*ti* by themselves (*auta*, see entry on *autos*), distinct from what they are applied to, and in such case, one can only have opinions about them (see the discussion on knowledge and opinion ending book V of the *Republic*, starting at *Republic* V, 475e3), or admit that such words refer to something independent of what they are applied to, to an *idea* (see this word), and, in so doing, one might get a chance to make them intelligible and to reach knowledge (*epistêmê*) about them.

**Dunamis** (noun; pl. *dunameis*): substantive derived from the verb *dunasthai* meaning “to be able to”. The usual meaning is “power, capacity, capability”. Aristotle uses this word in the sense of “potentiality” in opposition to “actuality”, for which he uses the word *energeia*, formed on the word *ergon* (“work, deed, action”) by adjunction of the prefix *en-* (“in, within”), which designates the quality (ending -*ia*) of what is “in deed” as opposed to only “potential”. This meaning is already present in Plato, for instance when, at *Sophist*, 247e4, he defines *ta onta* (“beings”) as being nothing more than *dunamis*: what he means by this is that, of whatever is said to “be”, that is, of any “being”, we have yet said nothing so long as we don’t add what it is (to *ti esti*), its “beingness (*ousia*, see this word)”, so that it is only “potentially” something, waiting for a predicative expression which will qualify it. In other word as a “being (*on*)” without further qualification, as the “subject” of a phrase of the form “*x* is *a*”, as this *x*, it is nothing specific yet so long as an *a* has not been specified, it is yet only “potentially” an *a*. At *Republic* V, 477c1-d6, Socrates explains that, to him, a *dunamis* is characterized by what it acts upon (*eis* *hôi* *esti*, literally “on what it is”) and what it accomplishes (*ho apergazetai*), mentioning sight and hearing as examples of *dunamis*. It is interesting to relate the words *pragma* (see this word), *dunamis* and *pathêmê* (see this word): a *pragma* is what possesses a *dunamis* allowing it to cause a *pathêmê* in something else, that is, to act (*prattein*, at
the root of \textit{pragma} in a way which “affects” (\textit{paschein}, at the root of \textit{pathêma}) something else. But the same \textit{pragma} may possess several \textit{dunameis} affecting different things, for instance a \textit{dunameis} affecting sight, another affecting hearing, and so on, and besides, the affection produced by the same \textit{pragma} may differ from one to another: for instance, one \textit{psuchê} (“soul”) affected by an image presented to it by sight may think that what it sees is all there is to know about the \textit{pragma} of which it is only an image, while another \textit{psuchê} understands that what it sees is only an image; in such case the \textit{pathêma} is different from the one to the other, and thus also the \textit{dunameis} causing it (this is what the analogy of the line at the end of book VI of the \textit{Republic} is all about).

\textbf{Eidos} (noun; pl. \textit{eidè}) (modified April 19, 2021); a word derived from a root meaning “to see”, which is almost identical to the present aorist \textit{eidon (“I see” or “I saw”) of the verb \textit{horan (“to see”). Thus, the \textit{eidos} is originally what is there to be seen, the “appearance” for human sight. From this primary meaning, the word takes the secondary sense of “species” (all the things having the same outward general appearance), and eventually of “kind”, or “form” (the “appearance” limited to its outward boundaries). For Plato, the \textit{eidos}, in the secondary sense, is what is common to all the things having the same name (\textit{Republic} X, 596a6-7), whether it be a physical being or an abstract concept. And it is this move from the primary individual sense (the “appearance” of a single \textit{pragma}), in which \textit{eidos} refers to what could be reproduced in an \textit{eikon} (“image”), to the secondary (collective) sense grounded in the resemblance of multiple “originals” which is key, not the move from criteria of resemblance taken from the visible to criteria of resemblance taken from the intelligible, because it is what makes the attribution of names possible and in the end, along with it, the \textit{logos} and most importantly \textit{dialogesthai} (the practice of dialog).

In the analogy of the line, in book VI of the \textit{Republic}, Plato has Socrates talk about \textit{horômena eidè} (“visible appearances”, 510d5) and a few lines later, of \textit{noeîton eidos} (“intelligible appearance”), 511a3). Thus, there is continuity of meaning from sensible to intelligible and it is the reason why he may use the same word in both cases. Indeed, it is to make us understand this continuity that he takes the risk of using the same word. And what must be properly understood is that, in either case, an \textit{eidos} remains an “appearance”, that is, a perception conditioned by the capabilities dans limits of what makes this perception possible, be it one of the sense organs or the intelligence, of which we have no way to be sure it reveals the whole of what it is an \textit{eidos}. And in both cases, \textit{eidos} may be understood in two ways, depending on whether one adopts an objective (the \textit{eidos} independent of any specific observer) or subjective (the \textit{eidos} as perceived by a specific observer with his own capabilities and limits at the time of observation) point of view about it: from an objective point of view, the visible \textit{eidos} is what is visible (\textit{horaton}) for human eyes in the abstract, not what is seen (\textit{horômenon}) by specific human eyes; the intelligible \textit{eidos} is what is intelligible (\textit{noeîton}) by the mind (\textit{nous}) in the abstract, not what is understood (\textit{nommenon}) by a specific individual ; from a subjective standpoint, the \textit{eidos} is what is perceived by a specific person at a specific moment of one’s physical and intellectual development with the defects of one’s organs of perception (for instance being color-blind or short-sighted regarding sight, or mentally retarded regarding intelligence) and this \textit{eidos} may thus evolve over time from the one this person associates with a given word he is learning when still an infant, based exclusively on visible criteria to the one he associates with that same word at the end of a life of study and reflection having allowed him to uncover criteria of intelligibility no longer dependent upon the visible appearance of what is under investigation and thus to reach its \textit{idea}. It is this “evolutive” character of our knowledge, which implies a learning process (see \textit{gignôskein}) spreading over time and implying change that the Eleon Stranger uses against those he names “friends of \textit{eidê}” and opposes to those he names “friends of the earth”, trying to make them understand that, if the refuse \textit{ousia} (“beingness”) to everything which changes, they make knowledge impossible for men (see \textit{Sophist}, 245e8-249d5, and especially 248d4-e5). Thus, the key breakthrough is not between visible \textit{eidê} and intelligible \textit{eidê}, but between \textit{eikon} (“images/resemblances”) and \textit{eidê}, as Socrates attempts to make us understand in the analogy of the line when he describes the process associated with the second segment of the intelligible as “building, without the images (\textit{eikonôn}) [revolving] around that, with the appearances themselves its own approach (methodos) through them” (\textit{Republic} VI, 510b7-9), \textit{eidê} implying at this point, where we reach the ultimate stage of the intelligible, intelligible \textit{eidê}, that is, \textit{ideai}. An \textit{eikon} (“image/resemblance”) is always image/resemblance of a unique subject while an \textit{eidos} implies generalization to a plurality of subjects resembling one another from a certain standpoint, which requires to ignore space and time and to “still” that which, at the individual level, keeps changing all the time, thus making \textit{logos} possible, that is, at the same time speech (and thus dialogue) and reasoning.

\textbf{Eikasia} (noun): “representation, comparison, conjecture”; substantive derived from the verb \textit{eikenai} meaning “to be/look like, seem” through the verb \textit{eikazein}, “to represent by an image or likeness, form a conjecture”. This is the name Socrates gives to the \textit{pathêma} (see this word) associated with the first segment of the visible in the analogy of the line at the end of book VI of the \textit{Republic}, the one where we stay prisoner of the images provided by sight without realizing they are always only images. Thus, \textit{eikasia} in this sense is the state, the quality (ending with \textit{-ia}), of who lives in a world of images (\textit{eikones} see next entry) taking them for reality, who develops a representation of the world around based on what is only images, without seeking more than what sight captures; it is, in the language of the allegory of the cave, the prisoner taking the shadows of the statues for “the true (\textit{to alêthes})” (\textit{Republic} VII, 515c1-2).
Eikôn (noun; pl. eikones): “image, likeness”. Like the previous one, this word is derived from the verb eikenai, which means that it stresses the idea of likeness, not solely visual. This is the concept Socrates uses in the analogy of the line, at the end of book VI of the Republic, to differentiate the two segments of the visible, giving as examples of eikones shadows and reflections in bodies of water or other reflecting surfaces. But the reading in parallel of the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave shows that what takes the place of reflections in the allegory inside the cave, image of the visible/sensible world, is the echo of the voice of the bearers of statues, that is, audible “reflections”, which nonetheless are sorts of eikones of those who utter these words, it that they give a non-visual “image” of them.

Einaí (verb; present part. masc. òn, fem. ousa, neuter on, neuter pl. ontá): “to be”. For Plato, this word is only a function word linking a subject (an on (“being”)) and a predicative expression (a “beingness (ousia), a “what it is (ti esti)”). When Plato uses this verb without a predicative expression, the context should always be used to determine which one(s) are implied and should be assumed. Thus, if he speaks of “being” in the intelligible realm, it implies being intelligible, while if it is in the visible realm, it implies being visible. And when “to be (einaí)” is opposed to “to become (gignesthai)”, it doesn’t mean that what becomes doesn’t “exist”, but that he opposes what is stable, immutable, everlasting… to what is changing, moving, unstable, temporary… Thus for instance when, in the parallel between good and sun toward the end of book VI of the Republic, Socrates says that, under the effect of the good (to agathon), everything which is known by us is not only known, but also gets from it to einaí te kai tôn ousian (“being and beingness”, 509b-8) in the same way as all which is lighted and made visible by the sun gets also from it tèn genesin kai auxèn kai trophèn (“becoming and growth and nourishment”, 509b2-4), obviously he doesn’t mean, when attributing to einaí to the good, that it is the productive cause of the material existence of all we know, but only that it is the cause of their “being intelligible”, of their intelligibility, since to really understand anything is for him to understand its relation to the good, in what way it may be good for us. And the ousia following the einaí is precisely the specific “value” of what is under consideration regarding the good. And, in the parallel, the einaí on the side of the good answers the genesin (“becoming”) on the side of the sun, in the same way the ousia, that is, the specific value of what it is with regard to the good and no longer solely the fact of “being”, the einaí, on the side of the good answers the growth resulting from nourishment, which gives each thing its specific consistency, and no longer a simple abstract and undetermined “becoming”, on the side of the sun.

If Plato distinguished two meanings for the verb einaí, it is not an existential meaning from a copulative one, as is often said, but a meaning implying identity in which “a esti b” means “a = b” (as for instance in “the person talking at the tribunal is Alcibiades”) from a meaning implying only association, in which a and b remain distinct from one another but share something in common, a “participating” (metechon) in the idea of b (as for instance in “Alcibiades is beautiful”, which doesn’t mean that Alcibiades is the beautiful, but that he participates in the idea of the beautiful). As for the supposed “existential” meaning einaí (“to be”) might have when used alone, without an explicit predicative expression, it is but a lure because, short of any explicit predicative expression it can have meaning only in assuming some implicit ones (such as “material”, or “sensible”, or on the contrary “incorporeal”), which opens the door to all kinds of sophisms, as Plato brilliantly demonstrates by example in the Parmenides.

And in the same way einaí is the least meaningful verb due to the fact that it may apply to absolutely anything since, as soon as I think about anything, it “is” at least a thought in my mind as soon as I utter any word, it “is” at least a word, the least significant predicate is hen (“un”), since to think about anything is to isolate it in thought and give it in this way a “unity” at least from a conceptual standpoint by making it one subject, one on (“being”). This is the reason why Parmenides’ raving in the dialogue bearing his name can lead nowhere, since they take as starting points only these two words having no specific meaning. The question about what “is” and what “is not” is meaningless. The only meaningful question is to figure out whether the combinations of words we make up adequately reflect what they purport to refer to, which can only be decided in the end based on the efficiency of these combinations in dialogues meant to lead to a result in action.

Epistêmè (noun): “knowledge”, rather than “science”, either in opposition to doxa (“opinion”) or in opposition to technê, which rather refers to a “technical” (English word derived from technê) know-how. The etymology of the word suggests the idea of “standing above”, that is, of “dominating” the subject-matter, master it and have a comprehensive view of it. Epistêmè is also the name used by Socrates, in his recall of the analogy of the line toward the end of book VII of the Republic, to replace noësis as the name of the pathêma (see this word) associated with the second segment of the intelligible (Republic VII, 533e8), which tends to make epistêmè something which, if at all accessible to a human being, remains incomunicable and beyond words, since words would make us fall back in the first segment of the intelligible, that of dianoia. This is the reason why sophia (“wisdom”, see this word) is out of reach of human beings, who can only strive for it and be in love with it (philooosophoi), without ever being sure of having reached it. The Theaetetus is a lengthy failed attempt to come up with a definition of epistêmè. Failed because rather than starting from an investigation of logos (which will be the topic of the ensuing Sophist), which is the unavoidable tool for the search for epistêmè, the discussion raises the issue of logos, understood in various ways that it attempts to define, only at the end, after other attempts at defining epistêmè have failed, trying to understand how logos might be something added to something else, namely opinion (doxa), already described as a logos (Theaetetus, 190a5), to transform it into knowledge.
Epithumia (noun; pl. epithumiai): “desire, passion, yearning, appetite” in all domains, not only sexual. In the analysis of the various parts of the psuchê (“soul”) by Socrates in book IV of the Republic, this word, used in the plural (epithumiai), describes one of its parts, also called epithumétiikon (“desiring” part). In opposition to the “reasoning” part (logistikon) which is principle of unity, the desiring part is principle of multiplicity by virtue of the multiplicity of desires (hunger, thirst, sexual appetite, and so on). If the word epithumia may be used for all sorts of desires, including intellectual ones, in the analysis of the psuchê, the “desires” associated with the epithumétiikon part are all the desires stemming from the body and the corporeal, “animal” nature of human beings.

Erôs (noun): “love, sexual passion” and sometimes “desire” in general. It is also the name of a Greek deity described by Plato as a daimôn in its genealogy as related by Diotima in the Symposium, that is, a deity intermediate between gods proper (theoi) and human beings. For Plato, erôs in a not exclusively sexual sense, is the primary moving force of the human psuchê (“soul”), driving it to establish relations with others especially through dialogos, which starts with the urge to ask questions (erôtan) to others. Even if both words, erôs, whose genitive is erôtos, and the verb erôtan (“to ask questions, question”, as opposed to eran meaning “to love”) don’t stem from the same root, the similarity between both words couldn’t not strike Plato, who plays on it in the fanciful etymologies of the Cratylus, associating Erôs as name of a god to hêros (“hero” in the Greek sense relating to the heroes of mythology), whom he considers half-gods before pointing at the similarity of the word with erôtan (“to question”) and eirein (“to talk”), which he equates to legein, from which logos stems (Cratylus, 398c5-d8). In the Symposium, Socrates, recounting words he heard from Diotima, describes the way this erôs may raise the soul from the exclusively carnal love aroused by the contemplation of one beautiful body all the way up to the idea of the beautiful (which is, in a first stage at least, the sensible dimension of the good).

Genos (noun; pl. genê): this word, derived from the verb gignesthai (“to be born, become”, see next entry) in its aorist form genesathai, means in its primary sense “family”, that is, a group sharing a common origin: “biological” family strictly speaking, sometimes limited to the children or to the direct descent, or, in a broader sense, all the member of a same “tribe”, “clan” or “race”, before taking analogically the sense of “class”, “sort”, “kind” or “genus” (its Latin counterpart). Aristotle opposes the genos to its constituent eîde (translated into “species” in this case). What should be noted about these two words is that genos designates “things” associated together due to their common origin while eidos, derived from a root meaning “to see”, associates “things” based on their common appearance. And if both have an origin in the sensible realm (“to be born” and “to see” are phenomena of the sensible world), both enlarge their meaning toward the abstract and intelligible realm.

Gignesthai (verb): this verb has two main ranges of meaning: as a punctive (non-durative) verb, its primary meaning is “to be born” and as a durative verb, its primary meaning is “to become”; the meaning “to be born” leads to the meaning “to occur” for any kind of event. Besides, at the aorist, it takes the sense of “to be” (“to be born” is “to be” once born and the moment of birth has passed). This being said, for Plato, this verb is often opposed to einai (“to be”) to distinguish what is subject to change and becoming to what doesn’t change and stays always the same.

Gignôskein (verb) (added April 19, 2021): the usual translation of this verb is “to know”, as is the case with the well-known Delphic precept gnôthi sáuton (quoted under this form, in which gnôthi is the second person of the singular of the active aorist of gignôskein, at Alcibiades, 124a8-b1, Protagoras, 343b3 and Philebus, 48c10), usually translated into “Know thyself”. But gignôskein is an intensive verb featuring reduplication (the pure root gnô- reduplicated in the initial gi-) and an ending in -skô expressing the repetition of an activity the accomplishment of which requires efforts, and thus its primary meaning is “to learn/get/come to know” so that a better translation of gnôthi sáuton is “Get to know thyself”, and it is obviously in this sense that Socrates understands it when making it his own. This primary sense of gignôskein is also found in the derived substantive gnosis, which, besides the meaning “knowledge”, also has the meaning “inquiry” or “investigation (especially judicial)”. This primary meaning of gignôskein is important as far as Plato is concerned in that it highlights the fact that knowledge (gnosis in a sense close to that of epistêmê) is the result of a process unfolding over time and implies changes in the apprehension of what one tries to know through eîde and ideai (see these two words) which don’t “fall” upon us from who knows which “heaven” of pure ideas inducing an instantaneously “perfect” and definitive grasping, but unvail progressively, first through perceptions of the senses, then through intelligence (nous), evolving for each person over time with no guarantee that she will ever reach perfect knowledge, nor that such knowledge be accessible to human beings. It is the change implied by the thought process leading to knowledge that the Elean Stranger uses in the Sophist against those he calls “friends of eîde” to make them understand that refusing ou sia (“beingness”) to everything which changes amounts to denying human beings the ability to know (see Sophist, 245e8-249d5, and especially 248d4-e5).

Gunê (noun): “woman” as opposed to anêr (“man”, see this word), that is, taking sex into account. For Plato, there is no difference in nature between men and women, both being endowed with logos, and thus being anthropoi (“human beings”). The only difference is that they play a different part in the generation of children, and this difference is relevant only regarding the generation of children, not regarding all other tasks that anthropoi, male
as well as female, are called to accomplish in the city through the sharing of collective tasks, including the role of warrior (see Republic V, 449a1-457b6).

**Heteros** (pronoun and adjective): “other (of two), other, different”. Under the form *thateron*, contraction of the neutral used as a substantive to *heteron* (“the other”), this word plays a major role in some dialogues, especially the *Sophist* and the *Timaeus*, in opposition to *tauton* (“the same”, see this word). In the *Sophist*, the Elean Stranger explains that *to mé on* (“the not being/being not”) simply means “the (being) other” and not “that which is not at all”, since to him as to Plato, “to be” (*einaí*) necessarily implies a predicative expression, a “beingness”, a something which the subject is (explicit or implicit) and so, similarly, *mé einaí* (“to be not”) implies a something the subject is not, without this implying that it is nothing at all, but only that it is something else. For the role of the pair *tauton/thateron* (“same/other”) in the *Timaeus*, see the entry on *autos*.

**Homologein** (verb): etymologically “to say (*legein*) the same (hemos) thing”, that is, “to agree, concede”. For Plato, the agreement implied by this verb is not limited to the agreement between persons, but starts with an agreement with oneself over time, that is, to always say the same thing”, so long as it is not the result of stubbornness and one accepts to change opinion if discussion and shared experience lead to reappraise one’s prior opinions. The specificity of the one who knows is to always say the same thing. So long as, on a given subject, one may be led to change his mind, it means that this person does not know and only has an opinion (*doxa*). The search for an agreement between interlocutors who subject their opinions to criticism by the others and share their experience, accepting to change their minds if the discussion requires it, is the basis of the Socratic “method”, since it is through dialogue only that logos gets its meaning.

**Homologia** (noun): substantive derived from the previous one: “agreement.”

**Horan** (verb; aorist *idein*, perfect *eidenai*): “to see”, and in the perfect used as a present, “to know” (“I have seen”, thus “I know”). Various inflexions of this word, depending on tense, are built on different roots (as for instance “to go” in English), the root of *idein* being the same as that of the Latin *videre* (“to see”) and the French “voir”, derived from it. This root is found in *idea* (see this word), and that of *eidenai*, which is a variant of it, in *eidos* (see this word).

**Horaton** (verbal adjective, neuter of *horatos*): in Greek, verbal adjectives ending with -tos (-ton in the neuter) express a possibility, like English adjective ending with -able (capable, unbelievable, thinkable…) or -ible (possible, perceptible, perfectible…), but some of them, in some contexts, may be equivalent to a mere passive past participle. Here, *horaton*, verbal adjective of the verb *horan* (“to see”), means “visible”, and is often opposed by Plato to *noéton* (see this word), verbal adjective of the verb *noein* (“to think”), most often translated into “intelligible”. These two adjectives are used by Socrates to qualify the two past participles *horômenon* (“seen”) and *nooumenon* (“though”), here again, not merely for stylistic considerations to avoid repetition, but based on the standpoint which is his in each case (which shows by the way that, in this case, the verbal adjective should not be understood as mere past participles): talking of *horaton* (“visible”) or *noéton* (“intelligible”) is to consider things from the standpoint of the *pragma* (see this word) capable of affecting sight or our mind directly and to attribute to it a property which is precisely the ability to affect sight, for what is said to be *horaton* (“visible”), or mind, for what is said to be *noéton* (“intelligible”), independently of the fact that there actually is anybody affected (something may be “visible”, even if nobody ever sees it), while talking about *horômenon* (“seen”) or *nooumenon* (“thought”) is looking at things from the standpoint of the affected subject and referring to their actual affections.

**Hupotheseis** (noun; pl. *hupotheseis*): etymologically, “what is put (themenos) under (hupo)”. Originally, this word does not have the meaning of its transcription into English, that of something “uncertain”, “conjectural”, which is found in the adjective “hypothesetical” and in its equivalent of Latin origin, “supposition”, but on the contrary, indicates what serves as a basis, as a support, as a firm starting point from where to build a reasoning “upon”. The examples of *hupotheseis* given by Socrates in the analogy of the line, at the end of book VI of the *Republic*, though in a geometrical context, “the even and odd, figures and the three appearances/sorts of angles” (Republic VI, 510c4-5), are not, for that matter, “hypotheses” in the modern sense, but rather initial prerequisite data from which a problem can be formulated.

**Hupothetenai** (verb): it is the verb from which the previous word is derived; its primary meaning is “to put/place under”, and by extension, with the idea of “placing” something “under” (that is, before) the eyes of somebody, “to set before (someone)” and from there “to suggest” and eventually “to assume, suppose”, from which the meaning “assumption, supposition” of *hupotheseis* derives, aside from the meaning “thing placed under, base, support”.

**Idea** (noun; pl. *ideai*): substantive derived from the root of the aorist *idein* of the verb *horan* (“to see”), with a meaning close to that of *eidos* (see this word), that is, “appearance”, in a first time visible, a meaning in which Plato sometimes employs it, for instance at Republic II, 380d2, where *ideai* alternates with *eidos* and *morphè*, (“form/shape”, another word whose meaning is close to that of *eidos* and *idea*), or at Republic IX, 588c4 and c7, or else at *Phaedo*, 109b6, where the final myth refers to the *idea* (“form, aspect”) of the earth. *Idea* is less frequent
in the dialogues than eidos (97 occurrences of idea compared to 406 occurrences of eidos). In some contexts, Plato uses idea designate a specific kind of eídè referring to nothing sensible, but only to intelligibility principles, what he calls noétôn eidos (“intelligible eidos”, Republic VI, 511a3) in the analogy of the line, as opposed to horômena eídè (“visible eídè”, Republic VI, 510d5). If, in this analogy, Socrates does not use the word idea, it is because, at this stage of the discussion, his objective is to establish a parallel between the visible/sensible order and the intelligible order and that, in the same way he exhibits a unique principle, that of the relation between image/semblance (eikôn) and original, to justify the splitting in two of each segment, that of the visible and that of the intelligible, he wants to insist on the fact that in both orders there are eídè and that there is continuity from an order to the other, intelligible as well as visible eídè being only “appearances” for us, human beings, not the pragmata themselves (auta). But when he describes the pathêmata associated with the second segment of the intelligible as the one where one relies only on eídè, it must be understood that, since we are in the intelligible, these eídè are intelligible eídè, hence idea and no longer visible eídè. It is only after having made it clear, through the allegory of the cave, which follows the analogy of the line at the beginning of book VII of the Republic, and its recall toward the end of this same book (Republic VII, 532a sq.), that everything which is visible inside the cave, starting with anthrōpoi (“human beings”, Republic VII, 516a7), or rather their individual soul (to which the word anthrōpoi refers in the allegory, always used in the plural), but also including animals (Republic VII, 532a3) and plants (Republic VII, 532b9), can be found individually outside the cave, which means that there are intelligibility principles, that is, intelligible eídè, ideai of the material creatures of the visible/sensible order considered individually, that, at the beginning of the last book of the Republic, book X, through examples taken in the realm of human craftsmanship (tables and beds, as it happens), thus easier to grasp that divine productions, he confirms that even of this, there are ideai, in the discussion about the three kinds of beds, after having introduced this discussion stating that “the usual method” of human beings is “to assume a certain unique eidos for each plurality” (they) assign the same name to (Republic X, 596a6-7) and having stated in the allegory of the cave that the chained prisoners give names to the shadows (Republic VII, 515b4-5), that is, to the visible appearance of material realities, which suggests that the eidos that we associate to things bearing the same name is not necessarily an abstract principle of intelligibility but starts being a mere visual appearance. The two examples he takes, trapeza (“table”) and klinè (“bed”) indeed exhibit successively a name, trapeza (“table”) assigned in the basis of an horômenon eidos (“visible eidos”) since etymologically, trapeza means “having four feet” and thus refers to the visual appearance of a table (which is not even specific to a table since a bed too may have four feet), and a name, klinè, assigned on the basis of a noétôn eidos (“intelligible eidos”) since klinè is the substantive derived from the verb klinein meaning “to lean/lie”, which means that the word points at the function of the piece of furniture so named, to its purpose (allow to lie on it), to what makes it possible to manufacture a bed without having to mention its external appearance, simply deducing it from the purpose of such a piece of furniture. And at this point, Socrates indeed refers to the idea of bed as what the bed manufacturer fixes his “eyes” on, though none of the craftsmen made it (Republic X, 596b6-10). If, of something material, there is not only a visible eidos, but also an intelligible idea, of a pure intelligible, there is only an idea, even if it can still be referred to as an eidos since an idea is a specific kind of eídè. This is the reason why Plato’s Socrates talks about the idea of the good (hē tou agathou idea), never about the eidos of the good. Such an idea, of a material thing as well as of a pure intelligible, takes for us the form of logos yet is not these logos, which may differ from a person to another or from a language to another. Thus, for instance, the idea of bed may be described by a sentence such as this one: “a bed is a piece of furniture intended for one or several persons to lie down on it to rest or sleep.” It can immediately be seen that the question whether the idea of bed is a bed is meaningless since the purpose is not to lie on an idea understood this way, and that the so-called “argument of the third man” suggesting that an idea shared by the manufactured beds and the idea of bed would be required to justify using the same name for both is meaningless and exhibits an inability to disregard visible images when thinking about anything and to grasp the difference between the realm of the visible and the realm of the intelligible displayed in logos.

In the dual process of gathering and dividing described by Socrates in the Phaedrus (Phaedrus, 265d3-266b1), that he presents as the tool of the one he calls dialektikos, the gathering is made “toward a unique idea” (eis mian idea) while divisions are made “according to eídè” (kat’ eídè) with a risk of not respecting the natural joints. This suggests that, while the divisions may be made anyway, for instance by prisoners chained since birth having as sole criteria of distinction for giving names the shadows, that is, the visible appearance of material realities, the gathering purports to reach (eis”toward”) the intelligible idea and is not completed so long as it has not reached this objective and thus not understood what makes an instance of what is under consideration a “good” instance of that, which can only be determined with regard to its purpose. This manner of understanding idea is consistent with the meaning its import into English as the word “idea” has taken.

Klinè (noun): “bed”. This word would not have its place in this lexicon had it not been used by Socrates, along with trapeza (“table”), in book X of the Republic, as example in the analysis known as “the three kinds of beds” which is key to the understanding of the words eidos and idea. What is important in the choice of examples, and which is impossible to reproduce in English without betraying the Greek, is that Socrates starts his explanations with two
examples of items of furniture (that is, material objects, not even living, not even produced by nature, but manufactured by human beings), klinê ("bed") and trapeza ("table"), one of which, klinê, names what it points at with a word derived from the verb *klinein*, meaning "to lean, lie down, recline, lie upon (something)", that is, with a word making its function known (a klinê is what we can klinein on, "lie upon"), while the other, trapeza ("table"), whose etymological meaning is "having four feet/legs", names what it refers to with a word describing its *external appearance*, its visible structure. Now, in what follows, after having noticed that the manufacturers of these items of furniture work with the idea of what they manufacture in their mind (suggesting that there is an idea even of such manufactured objects), he keeps only one of the two examples, klinê, that is, the one for which the name points at the function, the purpose of the object, helps us understand what this object is and in view of what it may be "good" to us. To have four feet tells us how the piece of furniture is structured, not what it may be used for and, incidentally, a bed too may have four legs. These seemingly insignificant choices, which do not strike the scholars I had access to, are nonetheless key to help us understand what Plato means by *idea*. To keep this import in English, rather than slavishly translating Plato’s Greek, klinê might be replaced, rather than translated, by “seat” (it doesn’t matter whether the noun is derived from the verb or the other way around, the fact is the word is both a noun and a verb and thus tells something about the use of the thing by that name) and trapeza replaced, rather than translated, by "tripod".

**Kosmos** (noun): the primary meaning of this word is "order" (as in “put things in order”, not “give an order”), and more specifically “good order, good behavior”. It is in reference to the fact that the Universe seems to obey laws and give good order that it is sometimes called “Cosmos”, meaning a well ordered Universe. In the last tetralogy, the *Timaeus* describes this “order” of the Universe as a model for the work that awaits lawmakers in charge of bringing order in cities.

**Krisis** (noun): substantive derived from the verb *krinein*, “to separate, distinguish, sort, decide, judge”, which refers to the general idea of distinguishing, of making a choice, and may mean “choice”, “decision”, “judgment” in a non-specifically judicial sense as well as in that specifically judicial sense. It is the word used by Hippocrates and his school to refer to the phase or phases of a disease allowing a diagnosis on the disease and the prognosis about its expected issue (recovery or death) and it is at the root of the English word “crisis”. From this same root stems the adjective *kritikos*, “able to discern, to judge”, which is at the root of the English words “critic” and “critique”. In the *Sophist*, the Stranger from Elea conducts successively seven attempts at “defining” the “art (technē)” specific of the sophist through the method of successive dichotomies, which may be put in parallel with the seven tetralogies of the cycle of the dialogues, five in the domain of the acquisitive arts, one in the domain of the arts which the stranger gathers under the general qualification of *diakritikē*, and eventually one in the domain of the productive arts. In the word *diakritikē*, the prefix *dia-* ("through, in the midst of") strengthens the idea of separation, but we are indeed in the domain of *krisis*, of discernment, of discrimination. And it is precisely on the occasion of this analysis of the art of the sophist that the Elean Stranger describes a manner of “healing” a “sick” soul (*psuchē*) suffering from the sickness proper to souls, ignorance, using a method by questions and answers (*Sophist*, 230b4-d4) which it is impossible not to recognize as the method used by the Socrates of the dialogues. And indeed, as soon as he is finished with describing it, the Stranger hesitates to acknowledge this technique as being that of the sophist, even if, as he says, it resembles it “like a wolf to a dog” (231a6), which reminds us of the *Euthydemos*, where precisely, the method of Socrates is presented in parallel with that of two caricatural sophists. This discussion of the sophist as “critic” is meant to solicit the “critical” mind, the ability to discern, the judgment (*krisis*) of the reader so that he may make a distinction between the sophist and the philosopher. It suggests that the sixth step in the progression of the dialogues is the time of *krisis* and it is indeed at this rank that the *Sophist* finds its place, as central dialogue of the trilogy of the sixth tetralogy.

The notion of *krisis* is again at the center of the last tetralogy since the name of its central dialogue is that of a character, Critias, whose name is derived from *krisis* and that its incompleteness, deliberate in my opinion, is precisely the practical test of the discernment of the reader at the end of the training cycle proposed by the dialogues: should Critias be allowed to complete his myth of Atlantis which suggests that the gods are those who settle human affairs (the dialogue is interrupted at the time where “Zeus, the god of gods, who reigns through laws”, is about to talk at the assembly of the gods he summoned to attempts to restore order in the island of Atlantis), or should we rather listen to old men who “defy” themselves by drawing laws (nomoi) for human beings while climbing the slopes of Mount Ida in Crete, in a dialogue, the *Laws*, which precisely starts with the word *theos* (“god”) beginning a question on the origin of laws (“[is it] a god or someone among human beings, in your opinion, strangers, [who] is responsible for the arrangement of laws?” (Laws I, 624a1-2))? For sure, Plato did not invent the name and character of Critias, a historical character who was a cousin of his mother and was for a few months one of the leaders of the government of the Thirty Tyrants, but he is the one who decided to cast it as the “hero” of this dialogue, at this point of his cycle, in a conversation which is the product of his imagination.

**Logistikos** (adjective; neuter: *logistikon*): having to do with reasoning, with reason. Adjective derived from *logos* through the verb *logizedesthai* which leans make use of one’s *logos*, of one’s reason, that is “calculate”, both in the mathematical sense of “compute” and in the more general sense of “evaluate a course of actions trying to anticipate their outcome”, “plan.” Under the form of the neuter to *logistikon* used as a substantive, it is the name of one of
the three parts of the tripartite soul presented in book IV of the Republic, the part endowed with reason, corresponding to the charioteer of the image of the winged chariot of the Phaedrus illustrating this tripartition.

_LOGOS_ (noun; pl. _logoi_): this word is rich of a broad range of meaning, all referring to the various manifestations of this defining power of human beings which distinguishes them from all other animals, their ability to produce through speech something having meaning and not limited to mere modulated sounds. No single English word may alone convey the full range of meanings of this Greek word, which even ended up becoming the name of the Son of God in John’s gospel (translated into “Verbum” in Latin, and Word in English, as in “and the Word was made flesh”). The whole cycle of the dialogue may be regarded as a long reflection on _logos_, its mechanics, its power and limits, which is in fact merely a reflection on what makes the specificity of human beings, required to determine what their “perfection (areté)” is, which can only consist in an optimal use of this defining _logos_ in view of happiness. Thus, _logos_ is at the same time meaningful vocal expression in all its forms (“speech, definition, tale, account, explanation, report…”) and what it manifests, that is, reason, which gives meaning to these words.

_Noësis_ (noun): substantive of action derived from the verb _noëin_ (“to think”), used to characterize what is fit to be thought as opposed to what is perceptible by the senses. For the opposition between _noësis_ and _doxa_ (“opinion”, see this word), used to refer to the two _pathèmata_ of the intelligible as a whole in opposition to _doxa_ (“opinion”, see this word), used to refer to the two _pathèmata_ of the visible as a whole. For the meaning of this opposition, which is not an opposition of _objects_ (sensible and intelligible) but of _attitudes of the mind_ toward sensible and intelligible objects, see the entry on _doxa_.

_Noèton_ (verb): verb of action derived from the root _nous_ (see this word) meaning “to perceive by the mind (nous), apprehend, understand, think”; there exists several forms of this verb with prefixes, such as _dianoèithai_ (middle, see this word); _ennóein_, to have in (en-) the mind” or “to put in one’s own mind”, that is, “to understand”; _katanóein_, “to understand”, in which the prefix _kata-_ adds a mere idea of completeness (“fully”). The _noein_ as an activity of the mind is often opposed by Plato to the _horaton_ (“to see”), an opposition also found between the words derived from these verbs; such as the verbal adjectives _noëton_ (“intelligible”, see this word) and _horaton_ (“visible”, see this word).

_Noësis_ (noun; plural _noëta_): substantive of action derived from the verb _noëin_ “thought”. This is the name Socrates gives to the _pathèma_ (see this word) associated with the second segment of the intelligible in the analogy of the line at the end of book VI of the Republic, in opposition to _dianoia_, associated with the first segment of the intelligible. When he recalls the analogy toward the end of book VII, Socrates replaces _noësis_ by _epistèmè_ to name this _pathèma_ and uses _noèsis_ to refer to the two _pathèmata_ of the intelligible as a whole in opposition to _doxa_ (“opinion”, see this word), used to refer to the two _pathèmata_ of the visible as a whole. For the meaning of this opposition, which is not an opposition of _objects_ (sensible and intelligible) but of _attitudes of the mind_ toward sensible and intelligible objects, see the entry on _doxa_.

_Noëton_ (verbal adjective, neuter of _noëtos_): verbal adjective of the verb _noëin_ (“to think” in the sense of “to make use of one’s mind, of one’s _nous_”), used to characterize what is fit to be thought as opposed to what is perceptible by the senses. For the opposition between _noëton_ and _horaton_ (“visible”), especially in the analogy of the line, see the entry on _horaton_.

_Nomos_ (noun; plural _nomoi_): “usage, custom, law”. For Plato, _nomoi_ are what allows the organization of social life between human beings as long as they are not all “wise (sophoi)” (in fact, nobody is) nor even _philosophoi_, and the few who are can’t personally solve all the problems of the others on a case-by-case basis. Good laws are the noblest production of human _logos_ and allow _anthrôpoi_ to bring order (kosmos) in their “cities (poleis)”, which constitute their “universe” of life and which they are responsible for building, using as a model the work of the _demiourgos_ creator of the _Kosmos_ which the Universe around them, which also obeys laws, constitutes. It is this notion of laws as the mark of human _logos_ in the world which helps understand the attitude of Socrates toward his condemnation to death, as he justifies it in the _Crito_: laws made by human beings, and not dictated by gods, may not be perfect and, as a matter of fact, the condemnation to death of Socrates was unjust, but if human beings condition their abiding by the laws upon considerations of personal interest and try to evade them when they become detrimental to them, or rather, to their material belongings and/or their body, it is the end of laws and thus of human reason (_logos_) in the world, and thus the end of Man, who differs from other animals precisely by the fact of being endowed with _logos_, and for whom the material body is nothing more than a temporary “housing” for his/her true “being”, which is the _psychè_ (“soul”).

_Nous_ (noun): “mind, intelligence/intellect” as a faculty of human beings added to senses to give them one additional access to their environment.

_On_ (pl. _onta_; present part. neuter of _einai_, “to be”): Plato uses this participle preceded by the neuter article in the expression _to on_ (literally “the being”, singular) or _ta onta_ (“the beings”, plural) to refer to what we would nowadays call the “subject”, especially in a grammatical sense (the Greek of Plato’s time had no grammatical metalanguage to refer to the various types of words and their functions in a sentence): _to on_, the “being”; is the one which is said to “be” in an expression of the form _x esti a_ (“x is a”) and _ta onta_, “the beings”, potentially refers to everything that can be referred to in such sentences, that is, everything we may isolate in our mind to make it a subject of any sentence, that is, in the end, everything, everything anyway which is on our part object of _logos_. Thus, words are a kind of _onta_ among other, as the Elean Stranger says in the _Sophist_ (see _Sophist_, 260a5-6, where he says it of _logos_ as a whole, of which words are the building blocks), since it is always possible to say at least that they “are” words. Thus, _to on_ is not “being, and even less “Being” with a capital “B” (which, by the way, would be _to einai_, infinitive, and not _to on_, present participle), which no one is capable of saying what it might “be”, precisely because, so long as no predicative
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expression is added, \textit{einai} alone, like “to be” in English, means nothing. Paradoxically, and most likely ironically, one of the very few dictionary style “definitions” found in the dialogues is the one given by the Elean Stranger in the \textit{Sophist} for \textit{einai/onta}, which reads as follows: “I declare then that whatever possesses the least power (\textit{dunamis}) either to act (\textit{poiein}) upon whatever else of any nature or to suffer (\textit{pathein}) even in the most trifling way under the slightest one, even if only once, all this [I declare] really to be (\textit{einai})”, which he summarizes under the form “for I set up as a definition to define ta onta (neuter plural, that is, the “subjects” of sentences having the general form “x is a”) that it is nothing else but potentiality (\textit{dunamis})” (\textit{Sophist}, 247d8-e3). As it stands, this definition covers absolutely everything and thus distinguishes nothing specific (on the meaning of the final summary, see the entry about \textit{dunamis}).

Where the ridicule is at its height, despite Plato’s efforts to clarify the meaning of this expression through the words of the Elean Stranger in the \textit{Sophist}, is about the negative expression \textit{to mè on} (literally, “the not-being”), usually translated into “not-being”, or worse, “Not-Being” with capital letters, referring to no one knows what, even more so than in the case of “being”. The Elean Stranger first tells us that the difficulty is the same with \textit{to on} and with \textit{to mè on} (\textit{Sophist}, 250d5-251a4), which means that to understand the one is to understand the other, and then, he focuses on \textit{to mè on}. And what he tries to have us understand is that, in the expression \textit{to mè on}, the negation doesn’t negate the subject, the \textit{on}, but the predicative expression which the conjugated form of the verb \textit{einai} which follows, the \textit{exi} or equivalent, introduces (or which is implied): \textit{x mè esti a} doesn’t deny \textit{x}, doesn’t make it a “not-being”, but on the contrary, introduces it as a subject (at least a grammatical one), thus making it an \textit{on}, a “being”, regarding which it denies the relevance of the \textit{predicative expression a}. But to say that \textit{x} is not \textit{a} is not to say that \textit{x} is nothing, but only that it is not \textit{a}, but might be a host of other things. In short, it “is” \textit{other} than \textit{a}. And if “not-being” calls for a predicative expression, then “being” calls for one too. An \textit{on} is a subject “being” (this or that) and a \textit{mè on} is a subject “not being” (this or that). In either case, a predicative expression is expected, explicit or implicit. The problem is that people don’t agree on the predicative expressions that must be considered implied when \textit{einai} is used without an explicit one, and thus, they may change from one person to another and depending on the context.

\textbf{Onoma} (noun; pl. \textit{onomata}): the primary meaning of the word is “name”, of a person or of a thing. This word is the root of the verb \textit{onomazein}, meaning “to name, call (something or someone by a specific name)”, used in the allegory of the cave, at the beginning of book VII of the \textit{Republic}, about the chained prisoners when Socrates says, before describing the freeing of one of them, that “if they were able to dialogue (dialegesthai) with one another, the same [things] being around [again], they would take the habit of giving names (onomazein) to those [things] they see” (\textit{Republic} VII, 515b4-5), that is, to the shadows on the wall of the cave facing them. \textit{Onoma} may also have the broader meaning of “word” as unit of language, as opposed to \textit{rhêma} (derived from the verb \textit{erein}, “to talk”) meaning “expression, phrase”, that is, a combination of words, as is for instance the case with the first definition of logos given by Socrates at \textit{Theaetetus}, 206d1-5, as “the [fact of] making clear one’s own dianoia (thought) through sound by means of verbal expressions (rhêmatôn) and words (onomatôn)” (see also \textit{Theaetetus}, 168b8 et 184c1, where the two words are used together). In the \textit{Sophist} on the other hand, the Elean Stranger uses these two words with specialized grammatical meanings, giving \textit{rhêma} the meaning “verb”, with the following definitions: for \textit{rhêma}, “the [one] being a revealer regarding actions (praxsein, dative plural of \textit{praxis}) and for onoma, “the vocal sign regarding those who act (prattousi, present participle masculine or neuter dative plural of \textit{prattein}) in these [actions]” (\textit{Sophist}, 262a1-7). What must be remembered here is that the grammatical language was almost nonexistent in the time of Plato, that for instance there was no words to distinguish between noun, adjective, pronoun and the like or to name the functions of words in a sentence (subject, attribute, predicative expression, complement and the like) and that even this distinction made by the stranger between nouns/names and verbs, that is, between “actors” and “actions”, was new, which explains why he had to define the specialized meaning he was giving to \textit{onomata} and \textit{rhêma}, which was not their usual meaning at the time. If this gross distinction between only these two classes of words, “names/nouns” and “verbs” is enough for him, it is because what he wants us to understand is that for a \textit{logos}, that is, for a combination of words intended to have meaning, indeed to be meaningful, it must combine these two categories of words. As he himself says, neither a list of names/nouns without a verb, or of verbs without a name/noun has meaning. For a combination of words to have meaning, it must refer, or pretend to refer, to a “fact (pragmata)” associating one or more “actors” (referred to by \textit{onomata}) with one or more “actions (praxeis)” depicted by “verbs” (rhêmatôn), making it possible to establish a relationship between the words uttered and observable “facts”, the meaning of the \textit{logos} thus uttered depending on the adequacy of the words used with what they purport to describe.

\textbf{Ousia} (noun): the usual meaning of this word in the time of Socrates and Plato was “that which is one’s own, one’s substance, property (especially real estate)”. But this word is derived from \textit{ousa}, the present participle feminine of \textit{einai} (“to be”), with a derivation similar to that leading in English from “being” to “beingness” (the neologism I use to translate \textit{ousia}). Already, in Latin, Cicero had done the same thing to translate \textit{ousia} which he was reading in Plato’s dialogues, coining the neologism \textit{essentia} (from \textit{esse}, “to be” in Latin), which has been transcribed into English as “essence”, a word sometimes used to translate \textit{ousia}. The problem with these translations, in Latin into \textit{essentia} as well as in English into “essence” or “beingness” it that they don’t import the usual meaning of \textit{ousia} in Greek, which is fundamental for Plato and must always be present in the back of the mind, even when \textit{ousia} seems to have
in the dialogues a “technical” and “metaphysical” meaning. Indeed, the word, derived from a root referring to “being” (what one is), had taken a meaning referring to “having” (what one has, what one owns), suggesting that we are what we own from a material standpoint. And it is precisely this way of thinking that Plato wants to challenge without changing vocabulary, but merely reverting to the root of the word. What makes the true “wealth”, that is, the true “good”, of human beings? Is it real estate and material wealth or something else? This idea of “value”, this reference to what is “good” in the most general sense not limited to material good, must always be kept in mind when reading this word in Plato’s dialogues. But most translations of ousia in English force on the reader a choice between the “material” understanding in the sphere of “having” (the usual meaning, translated into such words as “property” or “wealth”) and the “metaphysical” meaning in the sphere of “being” (“technical meaning”, usually translated into “essence” or simply “being”). This is odd since English, unlike French, has a word which has both meanings, the word “substance”, for which the Merriam-Webster Dictionary lists, among other, both the meaning of “essence” and that of “property” and the American Heritage Dictionary the meaning of “essence” and that of “material possessions; goods; wealth”. But it is probably precisely because “substance” keeps the dual meaning of ousia (plus others, not relevant here) that translators, who do not realize that Plato plays with these two meanings, avoid the word to show they have understood in each case whether he uses it (exclusively in their mind) in one or the other sense! Now, to make things still trickier, this “technical” meaning in the sphere of being is grounded in a “grammatical” sense stemming from its etymology, of that of “predicative expression”, that is, the a of a sentence having the form x esti a (“x is a”) saying something, whatever it might be, that the subject x of the sentence, the “being (to on)”, “is (esti)”, that is, “the what it is (to ti esti)”, which explains the fact that, in Aristotle’s works, ousia and to esti are synonymous. It is that same Aristotle who, with his categories, restricted the scope of ousia/to ti esti to only a subset of all the predicates of the subject, those which are permanent and properly apply to it at all times, in opposition to other predicates which he precisely tries to “categorize”: “accident” (something which the subject “is” only temporarily and “accidentally” and that other subjects, of the same species or of another species, might as well be), “quantity”, “position”, and so on. For Plato, this categorization is secondary compared to the main issue, which is to identify the relation with the “good” of all the predicates relevant regarding the subject, whether temporary or permanent. The question which matters for him is not what the subject is (ousia as “being”), but what is good for that subject (ousia as “value”). Hence the importance for him of the dual meaning of the word ousia and its import of the idea of “value”, which explains why he prefers this word to the expression to ti esti, which eliminates this import.

*Paschein* (verb; aorist pathein): the general meaning of this verb is “to have something done to one, suffer, be affected”, as opposed to prattein; “to act, achieve, accomplish” and also “be busy with, do business” in a subjective perspective, or poiein, “make, produce, do”, in an objective perspective. It implies an idea of passivity in opposition with the idea of activity implied by prattein or poiein.

*Pathèma* (noun; pl. pathèmata): substantive derived from paschein through the aorist pathein, by the same derivation leading to pragma from prattein (and poíema from poiein). These substantives may be compared to another series of substantives; pathos derived from paschein, praxis derived from prattein and poïesis derived from poiein. The words of the first series (pathèma, pragma, poíema) are more concrete than those of the second series (pathos, praxis, poïesis) and in general refer to a specific occurrence of what the verb implies (a specific instance of “affection”, something specific that someone or something “suffers”, for pathèma; a specific instance of “action”, a specific “affair” or “business”, for pragma; a specific production or achievement, and, in a more specialized sense, a specific literary work, for poïema, at the root of the English word “poem”), while the words of the second series refer to what the verb implies in the abstract, with no reference to a specific instance (the fact of suffering in general, or an unspecified instance of suffering or affection only to the extent that it is an occurrence of the fact of suffering, for pathos; an unspecified “act” or “activity”, or merely the fact of acting, for praxis; the fact of producing something, with no reference to a specific production, or, in a specialized sense, a literary work as such with no specific work in mind, for poïesis).

The pair pathèma (“affection” in the sense of “what affects us”, positively or negatively, physically or morally) – pragma is important in Plato’s writings since he uses the word pathèma to refer globally to what he associates with each of the four segments of the line in the analogy of the line at the end of book VI of the Republic, and the word pragma in several dialogues to refer to what words, the constituent parts of logos, are supposed to refer to. Indeed, it is important to always keep in mind the relation of complementarity which exists between these two words each time either one is used by Plato. This is the reason why the usual translation of pragma into “thing” is misleading, since it erases the idea of something active, at least on our senses and/or our mind. Through the use of pathèma in the analogy of the line, both in the visible realm and in the intelligible realm, Plato wants to suggest that the whole of our mental activity, whether directly induced by sensations or not, is the result of the “action” of something outside our mind, a pragma, which is not necessarily sensible, material, visible, tangible, but which must be there to explain the phenomenon of thought about it. When the stranger form Elea, in the Sophist, defines the “verb” (rhêma) as “the [one] being a revealer regarding actions (praxesin, dative plural of praxis)” and the “name/noun” (onoma) as “the vocal sign regarding those who act (prattousi, present participle masculine or neuter dative plural of prattein) in these [actions]” (Sophist, 262a1-7) and adds a few lines later that a logos (“speech”) is necessarily a speech on something (tínos einai...
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logon, 262e6) and must “associate[e] a pragma to a praxis by means of a name/noun and a verb” (262c13-14), he means that a logos has meaning only by reference to a pragma, that is, to something “acting”, “activating” our mind (though the senses or not), constituting a specific instance of a praxis (in the broadest possible sense, including passive attitudes on the part of the subject, as can be seen from his first example, “Theaetetus sites” (263a2)) depicted by a specific verb (rhêma) implying a specific subject (acting or being affected), described by a noun/name. And if, in the activity described by the logos, the subject may be acting or affected, the pragma depicted by the logos, which should not be limited to the “subject”, to the “thing”, but considered as including the whole of the “activity” described by the logos, is always acting on the mind of the person producing the logos, which justifies the use of the word pragma about it, and of pathêma about what this pragma produces in the mind of that person.

Phantasma (noun; pl. phantasmatai): substantive derived from the verb phantazesthai (“to become visible, appear”), itself derived from phainesthai (“display, bring to light, make known”), and also, intransitive, “come to light, appear”), meaning “apparition, phantom, vision”. It is one of the words used by Socrates in the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave to refer to “reflections” (Republic VI, 510a1; VII, 516b5), which he gives as an example, along with shadows, of what he means by eikones (“images, similitudes”), being careful in each case to add “in bodies of water” to make clear that what he has in mind is indeed “reflections”, which allows him to vary his vocabulary and to use also the word eidolon (“image, likeness, phantom”, Republic VII, 516a7), here again adding “in bodies of water”, thus showing that it is not the word which is important and that it is quite possible to understand one another using different words to talk about the same thing.

Philos (adjective): “beloved, dear, friend” with regard to both persons and things, which leads to the prefix philo- found in a great many words, the second part of the word specifying what one is philos of. Thus for instance philosophos (“friend of wisdom”), philanthrôpos (“friend of human beings”). The feeling toward what one is philos of is philia, which differs from erôs by the absence of sexual overtones, even if philia may also be translated into “love” and erôs refer to a kind of love not necessarily physical and devoid of sexual connotation.

Philosophos (noun): this word has been transcribed into English as “philosopher”, but this mere import may be misleading if the word is understood based on what is nowadays a “philosopher”. Yet, this ambiguity is nothing new and was already known by Plato, even if those his contemporaries used to call “philosophers” didn’t necessarily look like today’s philosophers, the only thing they have in common being to have little to do with what Plato called by this name. Most of book VI of the Republic; after Socrates has stated his proposal that philosophers should rule (Republic, V, 473c11-d6), is dedicated to making clearer what he means by this word and to point at the difference between his understanding of philosophos and that of most people. And the portrait of the “philosopher” he draws at the center of the Theaetetus, far from being the portrait of the philosophos dear to the heart of Plato is in fact a caricature of the philosopher as the geometer Theodorus imagines it (the word philosophos is used only once toward the end of the portrait, at 175e1, in the expression “the one you call philosophers” addressed by Socrates to Theodorus), that is the “philosopher” as seen by a “scientist”, who is but an eternal daydreamer withdrawing from the real world, in complete opposition with the philosophos according to Plato, worthy of leading his fellow human beings and for whom it is a requirement to do so.

Phusis (noun; pl. phusei): substantive derived from the verb phuein, “bring forth, beget, produce”, and also passive “to be born, grow”. According to Benveniste, phusis means “realization (completed) of a becoming (accomplissement (effectué) d’un devenir)”, “nature as realized with all its properties (nature en tant qu’elle est réalisée avec toutes ses propriétés)”. The word has many meanings such as “origin”, “birth”, “growth”, “nature”, all involving the idea of growth and the various stages of this process or of what produces it. Phusis is sometimes opposed to nomos (“law”) as that which is “by nature (phusei)” to what is the result of human conventions.

Pistis (noun): “trust (in others)”, “confidence”, “trustworthiness”, “faith”, and also “assurance, guarantee”. It is the name Socrates gives, in the analogy of the line at the end of book VI of the Republic, to the pathêma (see this word) he associates with the second segment of the visible, the one where, having understood that sight doesn’t reveal things (pragmata) as they are, but gives us only visual “images” revealing only their outer appearance, we are no longer in the illusion (eikasia) of believing that things are such as we see them, but have confidence that these images provided by sight are in most case good enough for us to act in this material and visible world and find our way through what is around us, which doesn’t exempt us, quite the contrary, from the task of trying to grasp their principles of intelligibility and their relations with the good, in the intelligible realm.

Polis (noun; plural poleis): “city”: refers both to a geographic entity and to a community living in such a place. A Greek polis in the time of Plato was not limited to the built-up area of an urban agglomeration but included rural areas around it belonging to the citizens of that polis and providing it with at least part of what it needed, especially in terms of food. As an example, the polis of Athens included most of Attica all the way to Cape Sounion. When Plato talks about polis, the word should not be understood in the modern sense of “city” or “town”, but rather in a sense closer to that of “state”, of a political (a word derived from polis) community constituting an administrative unity with regard to neighboring “cities”, with its own government, its own constitution and laws, its army, and so on.
**Elea** which Theodorus brought along with him, asking him if, for his fellow citizens (the citizens of Elea, in Italy), "politic", "politics", "political" and "politician". In Greek, the word could be used as a noun, with an article, to Politikos is lost in the translation by mere fact for someone to be a Politeia is another Greek city at the time, though located in Sicily. politès in whose house the dialogue reported in the Republic takes place, was a “metic” native from Syracuse in Sicily, another Greek city at the time, though located in Sicily.

**politeia** (noun): this word derived from politeès has a multiplicity of meaning, some of them relative to individuals as politai, others relative to the community, the polis as a whole: it may simply mean “citizenship”, that is, the mere fact for someone to be a politeis of one or another city; it may also refer to the body of rights and duties of a politeis; or else, the lifestyle fitting for a politeis; but it may also refer to the gathering of all the politai; or to the organization of the polis describing the various roles expected from its politai, that is, the “constitution” organizing the life of the city and its politeia, giving to “constitution” a broader sense that that of the word nowadays, including the whole body of laws of the city; and, eventually, but only lately and probably not before Aristotle, thus not in the time of Plato, it came to designate a specific type of government of the politeia corresponding to what is now called “republic”.

**Politikos** (adjective): “of, for, or relating to a city and its citizens”. It is the word at the root of the English words “politic”, “politics”, “political” and “politician”. In Greek, the word could be used as a noun, with an article, to mean “politicalian”, which is what Plato does. The Sophist starts with a question of Socrates to the stranger from Elea which Theodorus brought along with him, asking him if, for his fellow citizens (the citizens of Elea, in Italy), the words sophistês, philosophos and politikos refer to the same person or to different persons. The Sophist deals with the difference between sophistês, philosophos and politikos is to the verb paschein (see this word). On this word and his relationship with pathêma, and the limits of its usual translation into “thing”, see the entry on pathêma.

**Prattein** (verb): “to act, achieve, accomplish”, in opposition to paschein, “to have something done to one, suffer, be affected”.

**Psuchè** (noun; pl. psuchai): a word usually translated into “soul”, which is at the root of the English prefix “psych-” found in such words as “psychology” or “psychiatry”. For Plato, the psuchè is primarily principle of life and movement. It is what “animates” the body (“animate” is derived from the Latin word anima, which is the Latin equivalent of the Greek psuchè). It is in a way everything which, in a human being (and more generally in any animal capable of moving by itself), is not material but is nonetheless needed to understand and explain that being. By definition, this immaterial part which is necessary to explain the experience we have of human beings, and which we somehow experience within ourselves as far as we are concerned, eludes “scientific” understanding and certainty regarding both its nature and its destiny, especially at death, even though it is what constitutes most properly the anthrôpos, which cannot be searched in the aggregate of matter constantly changing and always renewed by food that the perishable body is. Anthrôpoi cannot know for sure in this life what happens at death. The Phaedo doesn’t attempt to “demonstrate” the immortality of the psuchè, which is impossible for human reason. Indeed, if Plato’s Socrates had such a demonstration, absolutely convincing for all, he wouldn’t need to propose several of them, as he does in this dialogue. All he does is to assume the immortality of the psuchè as an hypothesis and then search all the arguments, none of which is binding, giving plausibility to this hypothesis, and put to the test its consistency with other data from experience and other more abstract reasoning, to end up on the avowal, minutes before drinking the hemlock, that, as far as he is concerned, he has taken the “beautiful risk” (Phaedo, 114d6) of building his life on this assumption and on the complementary one that the good for a human being is the good for one’s psuchè, even at a time where it implied for him to accept an unjust death because it was decided
by his fellow citizens in respect of the laws in effect. In book IV of the Republic, Socrates conducts an analysis of the soul which, in order to explain the inner conflicts taking place inside man, distinguishes three parts in the soul, which he respectively describes as logistikon (“reasonable”) to designate reason as the unifying principle, epithumetikon (“desiring”), the one, plural, subjected to epiptumai (“desires, passions, yearnings, appetites”), and thumoeides (“having to do with thumos (see this word)”, “susceptible”, in between the two others. In the Phaedrus, he illustrates this tripartition through a myth picturing the soul as a chariot (representing the body) endowed with wings (because having through logos, reason, the power to rise toward the divine) pulled by two horses, one black, stubborn and hard to manage, picturing the epithumetikon (“desiring”) part of the soul, the other, white, easier to manage but capable of being led astray by the black horse, picturing the thumoeides (“susceptible”) part of the soul, driven by a charioteer who can only move the chariot through the two horses, which he must thus control and make to move together in the same direction.

Rhêma (noun): a word derived from the verb eirein meaning “to talk”, which, in its usual sense, refers to any vocal expression made up of words. On the relation between this word and the word onoma (“name, word”) and the more specialized meaning (for rhêma, “verb” in the grammatical sense) that the stranger from Elea gives them in the Sophist, see the entry about onoma.

Schêma (noun): word whose original meaning is close to that of eidos and idea (“external appearance”), meaning “form, shape, figure, air, manner, bearing”, which took a more technical meaning specializing to refer to geometrical “figures”. Contrary to eidos and idea which stem from a root meaning “to see”, schema derives from the verb echein, through the aorist schein, meaning “to have” and implying a relation of possession (echein meaning “to possess, hold, retain”). From this standpoint, it is the Greek equivalent of the Latin habitus (root of the English word “habit”), derived from the verb habere, Latin equivalent of echein. When, in the Meno, Socrates wants to help Meno understand what he means when he talks of a unique eidos common to all the aretai (“perfections, virtues”) which justifies that the same word be used to talk about all of them, in an attempt to have him explain in a synthetic manner what he means by aretê when he asks him whether human aretê can be taught, and Meno asks him an example of such a definition, it is not mere chance if the example he uses is precisely schêma, taken in its geometrical sense of “figure”: indeed, the geometrical figure may be considered the “embryo”, the most simplistic version, of eidos taken in a more general sense applying both the visible things and to abstract concepts.

Sophos (adjective): “skilled in any handicraft or art”, or else “learned”, “clever, ingenious”, “wise”. The quality of the one being sophos is sophia, which goes from “skill” in any practical matter to “learning” and eventually “wisdom”. For Plato, this wisdom, which requires exhaustive knowledge, is out of reach of human beings in this life due to the inherent limitations of their nature and of logos, which is the tool with which they seek it. This is the reason why human beings can at best be philosophoi, that is, “in love with wisdom/knowledge”, trying to approach it as close as possible for human nature and each one’s specific nature. And the first step toward this wisdom is to admit that it is out of reach but that this is no reason to despair of logos and fall into misology (misologia, “hate of logos”, see Phaedo, 89d4), which would be the worst kind of misanthropy, since logos is what distinguishes human beings from all other animals. If logos is not all-powerful, if it cannot give us access to undoubtable and demonstrable knowledge on the most important questions regarding the way of leading a good life as human beings (which justifies the “I know nothing” of Socrates), it still is the best tool at our disposal for that purpose and, in the same way it is not because sight doesn’t show us things as they are that we should refuse to trust it (pistis, see that word) and close our eyes forever, in the same way, it is not because our nous (“mind”) and the logos it makes possible don’t allow us to find undoubtable answers to the questions we ask ourselves that we should refuse altogether to use it and become alogoi (“irrational, deprived of reason”).

Sophistès (noun): a word derived from the root sophos originally referring to any person who is master, expert in one’s craft, whichever it is. In the time of Socrates and Plato it had come to refer to teachers of oratory who were going from city to city asking huge sums of money for their services at forming the sons of the wealthiest families in view of a political career. In view of the results and in the political context of the time, the word thus took a pejorative connotation, which endures in the English words “sophist”, “sophism” or “sophistry”. The Sophists that are best known to us are those Plato staged in his dialogues, Protagoras, Hippias, Gorgias (each giving his name to a dialogue, even two in the case of Hippias), or else Prodicus (staged in the Protagoras, and mentioned in several other dialogues) and Thrasymachus (staged in the Republic).

Sôphrosunè (noun): a word derived from sôs, meaning “safe and sound, alive and well”, and phrèn, which refer to the heart as seat of the passions or the mind, as seat of the mental faculties, perception and thought, through sôphron, meaning etymologically “having a sound mind”, and thus “wise”, but also more specifically “having control over the sensual desires, temperate, self-controlled”. Sôphrosunè is the quality of who is sôphron, “temperance”, “moderation”, and eventually a form of wisdom, in a sense close to that of sophia. Sôphrosunè, rather than sophia, is the theme of the Charmides because the dialogue stages teenagers and sôphrosunè, having a broader meaning than sophia, is a quality which may be expected from teenagers, more than sophia, which is seen more as the result of a long progression, thus, to be expected more, if not of old people, at least of mature adults. But
when the dialogue ends up in a discussion between Socrates and Critias, sophia is indeed in the background, even if the word is seldom used.

**Technè** (noun): “skill”, “technique” (the English word derived from it) as a set of rules, system or method of making or doing, especially in manual activities, “art, craft”. The word is sometimes opposed to epistèmè, which rather refers to a more theoretical and intellectual knowledge. But this doesn’t prevent Plato from talking of hé peri tous logous technè (“the art of speeches”, see for instance Phaedo, 90b7), or of rhetórlikè technè (“rhetoric art”, for instance at Phaedrus, 263b6), and not always in a pejorative way to downgrade rhetoric to a mere “cookery” since, when he describes to Phaedrus what a rhetoric worthy of that name should be according to him, namely, a “leading of the soul (psuchagògia)”, at Phaedrus, 261a7-8, he keeps calling it a technè. At Phaedrus, 276e5-6, he even goes so far as to refer to a dialektikè technè (“dialectic art, art of dialogue”), even if, at Sophist, 253d2-3, the stranger form Elea talks of a dialektikè epistèmè (rather than technè). We might say that epistèmè (“knowledge”) is the result to which technè (“art”) should lead.

**Telos** (noun): “end” in the sense of “accomplishment, achievement”. For Plato, rather than turning back toward the origin and the past, which we cannot change, we must determine the telos toward which we must progress and which will make us anthrôpoi as excellent and happy as possible and derive from this the path which may lead us there.

**Thumos** (noun): Originally, this word has a meaning close to that of psuchè and refers to the “heart” or the “soul” as seat of life; from there its meaning evolves toward that of “courage” and as referring to the seat of feelings, especially anger. In his analysis of the tripartite soul in book IV of the Republic (Republic IV, 436a8-441c3), Plato uses this word to refer to the intermediary part, which he also calls thumoeides, that is, “of the kind (eidos) of the thumos”. In the image of the soul as a winged chariot in the Phaedrus (Phaedrus, 246a7-b4 and 253c7-e5), thumos is pictured by the white horse. It is, along with desires (epithumiai, a word in which the root thumos is present along with the prefix epi-, “upon”, which means etymologically “what comes upon thumos to take control over it”), one of the two principles capable of moving (the two horses) the body (the chariot), which reason (the chariot), unable to move the body by itself, must manage to master and tame to allow the chariot to move properly and go in the appropriate direction, which reason alone can determine. Desires (epithumiai, grouped in the part of the soul Plato names epithumëtikon, that is, “desiring”) stem from corporeal needs (hunger, thirst, sexual appetite, and the like) while thumos is the part reacting to solicitations from the symbolic register expressed by words, that is, through logos, even if it remains alogon (deprived of reason) and reacts impulsively, instinctively, without taking the time to give much thoughts to its course of action: it involves the feeling of pride and honor, self-esteem, aggressiveness, and the like, feelings which answer no vital bodily needs.

**Trapeza** (noun): “table”. For the role of this word in Plato’s dialogues, see the entry on klinè.

**Zèn** (verb): “to live”, mostly about animals (including human beings).

**Zôion** (noun): “living being”, mostly “animal”, as opposed to phuton (“plant”) (see for instance Republic VII, 532a9, where Socrates, recalling the allegory of the cave, describes what the freed prisoner who just exited the cave still has a hard time to see as ta zôia te kai phuta (“animals and plants”), while in the allegory he had just mentioned “human beings (anthrôpoi) and the rest”). This way of classifying opposes implicitly the idea of phuein (“to grow”) to that of zèn (“to live”), which implies the ability to move by oneself, not that animals don’t grow, but what distinguishes them from plants is their ability to be self-moving due to their having a psuchè (“soul” as principle of movement), which plants don’t have.