1959

The development of Plato's conception of God.

Brunett, Harry Edgar

Boston University

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/14412

Boston University
BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PLATO'S
CONCEPTION OF GOD

by

Harry Edgar Brunett
(A.B., Washington and Lee University, 1958)

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
1959
APPROVED

by

First Reader  Richard Mrs. Millard...
Professor of Philosophy

Second Reader  Jane Ashton
Associate Professor of Religion
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Problem of the Thesis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Definitions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Limitations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Previous Research in the Field</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The Methodology of the Thesis</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. PLATO AND HIS TIME</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Life of Plato</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Works of Plato</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Periods of His Work</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Chronology of His Work</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III. EARLY GREEK RELIGION</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Homeric Pantheon</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Destruction and Reconstruction of Greek Religion</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Political Influences</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Greek Tragedians</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Pre-Socratics</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Greek Mystery Religions</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IV. GOD AND THE DOCTRINE OF IDEAS</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Doctrine of Ideas</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Phaedo</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Republic</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Parmenides</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. God and the Good</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. The Metaphysical Aspects of the Good in the Republic</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. The Religious Aspects of God in the Republic</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. GOD AND THE SOUL</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Being of the Soul</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Doctrine of Immortality</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Meno</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Phaedo</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Republic and Phaedrus</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Timaeus</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. Laws</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Implications of the Immortality of the Soul</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. The Divine Nature of the Soul</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Immortality as Key to Plato's Theology</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. PLATO'S CONCEPTION OF GOD</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Being of God</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Euthyphro</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Republic</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Phaedrus</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. God as Finite Creator</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. The Creation Myth</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. The Demiurge</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Nature of God</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Existence of the Gods</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The Providence of the Gods</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. The Justice of the Gods</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lv. Conclusion</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. The Problem of the Thesis

The problem of the thesis will be to examine the concept of deity as it is developed in Plato's philosophy. There will be no attempt to demonstrate a unity of Plato's thought; however, it is felt that Plato's final statement of his religion and theology in Book Ten of the Laws represents both a reconstruction of his earlier thought and a final synthesis of his interpretation of Greek religion. Therefore the thesis will move towards an understanding of Book Ten of the Laws insofar as that book informs the entire development of Plato's conception of God.

2. Definitions

Plato does not hold to a definite, clear-cut definition of God throughout his dialogues. He is much indebted to the religion of the Pre-Socratics, tragedians, and the mystery cults, and he initially endorses the various gods of this early Greek religion. But it was his reaction to the religion of this early polytheism that stirred Plato to formulate his own concept of God. Therefore it must be borne in mind that the idea of God in Plato's thought changes as he first discards his antecedent religious background in the early
dialogues and develops his highly monistic concept of deity in the Timaeus and the Laws.

3. Limitations

The thesis will deal only with the antecedent religious background from which Plato was to formulate his conception of God; the doctrine of Ideas as it was brought to bear on his philosophy of the soul; Plato's treatment of the existence and immortality of the soul, which is his basis for positing a God; and the religious cosmology of the Timaeus and Laws in which is seen Plato's perfected conception of God. The thesis is further limited to those aspects of Plato's thought that show definite transition from one level of development to another. Only those dialogues which fully represent a particular stage in Plato's development will be referred to.

4. Previous Research in the Field

One of the earlier works on Plato's concept of God is Taylor Lewis' Plato Against the Atheists. This volume treats Book Ten of the Laws as a culmination of Plato's religious thinking. P. E. More's The Religion of Plato,

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1Taylor Lewis, Plato Against the Atheists (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1845).

and Friedrich Solmsen's *Plato's Theology*\(^1\) both develop the religion of Plato as it arises in the course of his philosophy. More's approach is similar to Lewis' in that they both lend a sympathetic Christian ear to Plato's theology. H. R. Lewis, of the Boston University School of Theology, wrote his master's thesis on Plato's God and the Idea of the Good, which contrasted Plato's ethical God with the Form of the Good.\(^2\)

5. The Methodology of the Thesis

It is not until the writing of the *Timaeus* that a definite conception of God emerges—one which has any relation to the Judaean-Christian deity that is generally connoted by the word God. Thus, the thesis will be primarily concerned with the treatment of certain aspects of Plato's thought that would render the emergence of God in the *Timaeus* a logical consequence of his earlier dialogues as well as give more persuasive significance to the theology of Book Ten of the *Laws*.

The Doctrine of Ideas and the philosophy of the soul will be treated as they were developed in themselves and as they were later to contribute to the cosmology of the *Timaeus* and


the theology of the **Laws** which are the products of Plato's mature religious thought. As an over-all background to Plato's philosophy, an appraisal of early Greek religion will be made in an attempt to determine some of the major influences to which Plato was indebted in his work.

The methodology of the thesis specifically will be to give the logical and chronological development of the Ideas and the soul, which is the basis for Plato's concept of God. Having presented the concepts of the Forms and the subsequent belief in the immortal soul, the thesis will move to a consideration of Plato's deity—a God who is the Creator in the *Timaeus* and the loving Father in the *Laws*. 
CHAPTER II

PLATO AND HIS TIME

1. The Life of Plato

It is believed that Plato was born in the month Thargeleion (May-June) about 428 B.C. and died at the age of 80 in 348 B.C. The dates of Plato's life are only approximate as they are determined in relation to other equally doubtful historical events. Plato was the son of Ariston and Perictione, and was first named Aristocles after his grandfather. Later he received the nickname of Plato from the broadness of his shoulders and chest. Being of aristocratic and wealthy Athenian parentage and having enjoyed all the educational and social benefits of such an influential and well-to-do family, Plato was exposed to the Periclean world at its zenith. The art, drama, education, and politics of this period made an indelible imprint upon young Plato's character.

At the age of about 16 Plato attached himself to Socrates, and formed a close association with his master that was to last twelve years. About all that can be said definitely is that up until the age of 26 the influence of Socrates' friendship must have been the most potent force in the young phi-
It was not until the death of Socrates that Plato decided to forsake a career as a social and legislative reformer and become a thinker or man of science.

Following the trial and death of Socrates, Plato, fearing for his life at the hands of his master's executioners, withdrew from Athens to the neighboring city of Megara where he lived with Euclides, a philosopher who combined both the tenets of Socrates and those of Parmenides. This exile was only to last as long as the bitter feelings of the cause célèbre surrounding Socrates' death were still impassioned. Following his stay in Megara, Plato spent approximately the next ten years traveling in Italy, Cyrene, and Egypt.

About 390 B.C. Plato visited Magna Graecia and Sicily where he became acquainted with the Pythagorean and Orphic teachings, especially the doctrines of the origin and immortality of the soul and the moral life. It was also in Syracuse that he took part in some political action with his close friend Archytas, the brother-in-law of the reigning tyrant.

1Very little is known about Plato's early life and association with Socrates. The little that can be directly conjectured is found in Plato's early dialogues; cf. Apology and Phaedo.

Aionysius. This action ended disasterously, and Plato was interned as a political prisoner by Dionysius and sent to Aegina to be sold as a slave. "Luckily for Plato and Western Civilization, a friend of Plato recognized him, bought him, set him free, and sent him back to Athens."¹ Plato then spent ten years writing philosophical works which represented more the views of Socrates than his own.

At the age of forty Plato established the Academy, and spent the remainder of his life, with the exception of three violent trips back to Syracuse, organizing his Academy, teaching and writing. It was during these years that he wrote the dialogues of his middle and later period.

In the year 367, Plato, now a man of sixty, was invited by Dion, the brother-in-law of Dionysius II, the feeble ruler of Syracuse, to come to Sicily and educate Dionysius II to the philosophy and science of the Academy. One failure followed another. After his third attempt proved fruitless, Plato withdrew from active politics and concerned himself solely with the affairs of the Academy. Plato's later life was uneventful save for two highly significant occurrences. In 367 B. C. Aristotle arrived at the Academy. In 360 B. C.

¹This account of Plato's trip to Italy is taken from Peter A. Bertocci's "Syllabus for the History of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy" (Boston University Graduate School, 1958), p. 10.
Plato wrote the Laws, the crowning achievement of his philosophic life. Plato finished out his days at the Academy, meditating and lecturing to his associates.

As it is recorded in the Timaeus, Republic, and Parmenides, Plato was expertly schooled in the aristocratic Periclean political regime. He was born and grew up in an aristocratic atmosphere, so Plato was imbued with a natural bias against democracy. Coupled with this childhood background, the events of Socrates' death put the finishing touches on his distrust of any form of democracy. But unlike Socrates, Plato employed the technical competence of political leadership and moral education of the people against the enemy of independent thought and action. As seen by his experiment in political and moral aristocracy in Syracuse, Plato was not content merely to theorize about the good life, he also practiced it—early in the arena of the minds of common men, later among the more developed minds of his disciples. No small wonder it was that upon his death the legend sprang up that saw in him a son of Apollo, guardian of the Good.

2. The Works of Plato

1. Periods of His Work

There still seems to be some question as to the exact order of the Platonic Dialogues. Numerous sources have been
consulted, and a synthesis has been developed to make as much coherence as possible from available data and to make meaningful the methodology of the thesis.¹

As will be seen from the chart which follows, the first period of Plato's work can be termed The Minor Socratic Period. The division of Plato's dialogues represents Plato's endeavor to carry on his master's philosophical method of inquiry. On the whole these dialogues are short, simple statements concerning most of the problems in which Socrates was interested. By and large no final view of metaphysics is stated, and only the nature of definition and knowledge is examined. It would appear that Plato is concerned primarily with asking the important questions and less concerned with any clear-cut answers to these questions.

The Later Socratic Dialogues were composed in the second period of Plato's writing. The figure of Socrates dominates this section, and the events of his trial and death form the historical background for the Socratic philosophy. "In the dialogues of this period Plato still shows himself under the ban of Socratic intellectual determinism,"² as he strives to


²Zeller, op. cit., p. 139.
articulate Socrates' ethics and morality.

The third period, or the Middle Period, suggests a decided break with the earlier two parts of the Platonic writings. The importance of Socrates as a dramatis personae is now secondary to the subjects of the dialogues themselves. "Plato in his early dialogues was working out his master's thought; ... he gradually saw that Socrates, especially in his theory of concepts, didn't go far enough, and developed his metaphysical theory of ideas."¹ Thus the development of the doctrine of Ideas is of primary importance in these dialogues. Plato is trying to answer two questions in this "critical" period: What is man's relation to the world, and, What is the nature of man? This period of his writing took place after the encounter with the Orphics and Pythagoreans of Italy. The Pythagorean theory of the soul is developed fully in the Phaedo, after it had been explored earlier in the Gorgias and the Meno. The great works of the Republic, Symposium, and the Phaedrus were written in this period and the doctrine of Ideas was given its initial statement. At the end of this period Plato began to raise objections to some of his earlier concepts, and it is these objections that mark the beginning of his final period.

The final section of Plato's work is called the Period of Reconstruction. By this time Plato had been some twenty

¹Bertocci, op. cit., p. 23.
years at the Academy, and his thought had undergone the modifications of reflective maturity. There is little or no mention of Socrates in these final dialogues. Plato is on his own, and Socrates is brought in only to illustrate his epistemological doctrine that knowledge is possible. Plato's own metaphysics is reworked in this period, and the final statement of his political, social, and theological views is made. The Laws represent the conclusion of Plato's systematic philosophy. Combining all the elements of Greek religion, early Greek philosophers, and his own teacher Socrates, Plato brings to a final synthesis his life's investigation of nature, man, and God.

11. Chronology of His Work

Part One: The Minor Socratic Dialogues

1. Hippias Major
2. Hippias Minor
3. Ion
4. Menexenus
5. Charmides
6. Laches
7. Lysis
8. Cratylus
9. Euthydemus

Part Two: The Later Socratic Dialogues

1. Gorgias
2. Meno
3. Euthyphro
4. Apology
5. Crito

1No attempt has been made to determine the validity of the Epistles or other doubtful writings of Plato. This table follows Bertocci's order according to periods and Taylor's over-all chronology.
Part Three: The Middle Period

1. Phaedo
2. Symposium
3. Protagoras
4. Republic
5. Phaedrus

Part Four: The Reconstruction Period

1. Theatetus
2. Parmenides
3. Sophist
4. Politicus
5. Philibus
6. Timaeus
7. Critias
8. Laws
9. Epinomes (doubtful)
CHAPTER III

EARLY GREEK RELIGION

The early Greek religions became ingrained in every Greek in Plato's time, both shaping his thinking and governing his way of life. Because of the tremendous influence religion had on young philosophers and statesmen, a brief investigation will help shed some light on the early thinking of Plato himself.

By and large, Greek religion was more a perfected humanism than a relationship between man and God. The objects of devotion ranged from a lawful nature, to a lawful state, and to the will of the gods, which many times were no more than causal agents. Very little serious attention was paid to man's soul before the time of Socrates. The Greeks did not base their religion on the inner experience of the soul; rather, they felt themselves akin to nature which came to them from without, and there was little or no distinction between the natural and the moral law. However, a more religious orientation was soon grafted on these animistic and naturalistic tendencies. At the time of Homer, a religion had begun to mean the search for help and guidance from

1The treatment of Early Greek Religion is not intended to be exhaustive or in any way complete. Rather, it is a cursory survey of some of the more important influences on Plato's philosophy of religion.
God and the gods for internal needs.¹

1. The Homeric Pantheon

Plato refers again and again to the Homeric gods.² In his poetry and prose Homer set the tone for early Greek religion by anthropomorphizing the animistic beliefs of the early Ionians. Religion then became, in the era of Homer and Hesiod, a matter of man's personal and social relationships with these Olympic deities. These gods were quite unlike the God of the early Hebrews. The gods symbolized natural powers; they were human beings without mystery. They acted from common and ignoble motives, not seldom from envy, caprice, or lust.³ But behind and above these "carefree gods" there gradually arose a power to which the early Greek looked up to with the utmost seriousness. This power was immutable fate or Moira. In contrast to the pulsating vitality of the humanized gods, this fate was a bloodless abstraction, the creation of which made man realize his dependence on the natural laws.⁴

With this wide gulf present between man and the gods,

¹Bertocci, op. cit., pp. 2-3.
²Shorey, op. cit., p. 8, says that "Plato quotes or alludes to Homer about one hundred and twenty times."
⁴Zeller, op. cit., p. 23.
it is evident that no man is a god or can become a god. This insight is Homer's special contribution to Greek Religion, and, historically considered, it is one of the most important ever made.\(^1\) With this important step we can begin to notice a gradual maturing of the Homeric theogony from his early, almost naive, consideration of the conception of the world and its divine personages to his later treatment of the gods in a moral setting.\(^2\) The cult of the Olympian Gods demanded perfection of type, but these gods mingled in human affairs internally as patrons of groups and cities rather than redeemers from evil.

Beneath this Homeric unsophistication lay a reflective wonderment about the world and life. There is a deep feeling for the transience of all earthly things and a need to find some permanence in this world of change. For the Homeric man "life in the light of the sun is the true life, against which the shadow existence in Hades is of no significance."\(^3\) The shortness of life, the problem of evil, and the nature of suffering are all themes touched upon in Homer's later poems. There is nowhere any trace of the working out of these


\(^2\)G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, The Pre-Socratic Thinkers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), deal with this very important phase of Homer's cosmology and theogony in their chapter on Forerunners of Philosophical Cosmogony.

ideas, but the notes are sounded—awaiting the answer of later thinkers. "Beneath the surface of the heroic poetry and its myths the Logos begins to stir, soon to grow bold and raise its head." ¹

The groundwork was now laid. Homer and his counterpart Hesiod had determined the course of Greek thinking from the late Eight Century B.C. down to the early Fifth Century. "It was Homer and Hesiod," said Herodotus, "who composed a theogony for the Greeks, and who first gave the gods distinctive titles, and defined their form and functions." ² But sometime in the Fifth Century Greek religion entered upon a critical stage in its development.

The old popular cults no longer satisfied the new strong emotions, and the necessity for a personal relation between the individual man and his God made itself felt. . . . The insecurity of property and life which the political revolutions brought with them could only intensify the deep innate feelings for the transience of all earthly things and cause him to look for some supernatural support which would assure him security and permanence amid all the change of mortal things. ³

Let us now move on to an analysis of this critical period for a statement of the causes and results of this upheaval in the religion of Homer.

¹Ibid.
²Thomson, op. cit., p. 763.
2. The Destruction and Reconstruction of Greek Religion

The legend of Homer's mythology was destined to pervade Greek thinking as late as the time of Plato, but other factors were to arise which determined the character of Greek Religion until the triumph of Christianity.

i. Political Influences

Probably the most enduring political contribution of the Homeric religion was that through the Olympic gods Greece was given a unifying mythology and a national consciousness.¹ These Panhellenic gods possessed a certain intrinsicality and universality of their own, independent of religion. In the later Homeric poems it is noted that the histories of the gods were becoming increasingly bound up in the secular life and legends of Greece. As the Greek city-states became more autonomous, they adopted their own deities from the Homeric Pantheon and made these deities national idols. The citizens of the cities looked to their gods as their protectors and even conceived of these deities as symbols of their city. "In the classical Greek city, devotion and observance of duties to the city-protecting deity and loyalty to the city herself are one and the same thing."² To question the existence of the gods was, in effect, questioning the reality of the city-state. At the height of the Hellenic civilization

¹Solmsen, op. cit., p. 8. ²Ibid.
the Greek possessed his individual identity only insofar as he was a citizen of a city-state. And just as each Greek was first and foremost a citizen and his life, status and well-being was bound up with his city, so it was of his gods and goddesses. It was but a step to attribute the ideals of the city to its protectors. Athena and Zeus had come to stand for the idea of justice, and, in general, all the more important gods were less arbitrary than they had been in Homer's time. This transformation in large measure is the result of their becoming "citizens." More and more the fortunes of the gods were related to the fortunes of the city-states and their citizens. But as a result of this more refined interpretation of Homer, the gods were destined to be radically transformed by the same crisis that was to upset the old relations between the individual and the state. And this traumatic disaster was to take the form of the Peloponnesian War, 431-404 B.C., in which the status of man, state, and religion was put to task and finally uprooted. However, this upheaval was not to occur for some years. Other influences were to arise to shake the foundations of Homer's religion.

1Ibid., p. 4.
2Ibid., pp. 11-12.
ii. Greek Tragedians

As long as there was no doubt that the morality of the gods completely corresponded to the official morality of the city-state, the religion of the city-states continued unquestioned. But this situation was not to last. In the latter half of the Fifth Century cracks were already noticed in the religion of the city-state. The sophisticated Greek tragedians: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides initiated the destruction of the state religion by attacking the morality of the city-states and their citizens. New Standards were set up by these literary moralists. Ethical individualism replaced the morality of the many. But the poets and playwrights did not end their attack with the state. As soon as the traditional morality was questioned in the state, the gods, too, came under careful scrutiny. To be sure, it was the gods who were attacked, never the standards they bore. Because the Homeric poems were so deeply ingrained in the minds of the Greeks, their religion was not easily destroyed. But the tragedians succeeded in capturing the minds of the intelligentsia through their poetic efforts, and gradually Homer was replaced by these poets, and Homer's gods fell before these new conceptions of the deities.

Aeschylus, the father of tragedy, is much indebted to Homer and Hesiod for a great part of his literary material. Apollo and Athene still retain most of the divine attributes
that Homer had ascribed to them, but they now represent more
the embodiment of truth, knowledge, and wisdom. Theology
is sought not in mythology, but in history and man's con-
sscience. The supreme deity is not only all-powerful but
also all-just. Zeus in Prometheus, Agamemnon, and the
Oresteia trilogy is thought of as "Strength and Justice--
the greatest of all." Along with this personal aspect of
the gods arose an impersonal conception of universal order.
This is a more advanced notion of Homer's fate. Aeschylus'
contribution, then, is found in his attempt to moralize
traditional beliefs, embodied in myths and institutions,
by the light of certain religious presuppositions and moral
convictions.¹

In the work of Sophocles the gods are still national
heroes and living powers, but more stress is laid on the
universal supremacy of Zeus and the oracular truth of Apollo.
Athene also holds a conspicuous place among the gods. The
sovereignty of Zeus spares none whose folly misleads them
into sin or evil. Life many times appears to be a "vale of
tears" from which death is the only release. Divine rule
is inexorable, and piety is never without its reward. For
Sophocles, even more than for Aeschylus, fate is identified
with an inscrutable Divine Providence of which the oracles

¹"Aeschylus," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,
are the exponents. The religious thought of the poet is seen throughout his works. This is illustrated by such themes as an eternal law of integrity in thought and action (*Oedipus Rex*); the punishment of disobeying God's commandments (*Oedipus Coloneus*); the hope of grace (*Oedipus Coloneus*); and the misery of human life (*Trachinioe*). Sophocles, having experienced much of the realities of life, did express the hope that shines through the sadness of life.

The loyal heart of Antigone, the love of Deinaira, the brotherhood of Teucer, the essential purity and public spirit of Oedipus, the faithful endurance of Electra, the incorruptible truth of Neoptolemus—these belong to the eternal things, however, on this narrow isthmus of morality, they may be frustrated or obscured.

Euripides, the last of the three great tragedians, is especially important to Greek religion because his emphasis on the immortality of the traditional gods (*Ion, Auge, Danae*); the problem of the unjust government of the world (*Belluophon, Troades*); and the wickedness of the "sacred duty of revenge" (*Electra, Orestes, Hecuba, Medea*). Euripides has been called the poet of the Sophistic movement. On the whole, the Sophists were agnostic, but Euripides followed their scepticism more out of an attempt to make sense of religion than to destroy it. As Aristotle noted, Euripides was first a poet, second a philosopher. He treated the great themes of life, but never

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attempted to systematize them. It is through the emotional power of his drama that much of the religious spirit of his time was communicated to the Pre-Socratics.¹

It was through the efforts of these three great dramatists that the religion of Homer was transformed into that of the Pre-Socratics. True, the capricious gods of Homer's songs were toppled from their former position. But now the gods were of the nature of virtue and human conscience, and their homes were in the universe rather than in the city-state.² The gods now lacked the characteristics of wicked and weak humankind. They now participated in Perfection and enjoyed only the highest kind of existence.³ It is clear that the Greek tragedians were striving to attribute to their object of care some of the qualities they found so honorable in themselves. Excellence, piety, justice, honor, and perfection were thus imparted to the gods.

iii. Pre-Socratics

The Pre-Socratic philosophers were not oblivious of the religion of Homer and the tragedians, but their concern was primarily in the understanding of the physical world. The

²Solmsen, op. cit., p. 40.
³The Greek concept of Arete must be taken for Perfection at this stage of Greek philosophy.
same myths were still being used, but the old gods (Zeus, Hera, Ares, and the other Olympians) were introduced to a new role. The individual souls lost their wings, and were now taking part in the rotation of the firmament.  

Generalizations will be made concerning most of the Pre-Socratics, and specified reference will be made only to those thinkers who directly influenced Plato's theology. The search for a coherent cosmology led many of the early Eleatics and Atomists to postulate both an anthropomorphic deity and a pantheistic theology. As early as 600 B.C. Thales spoke of gods existing in everything. There appears to be life in Heraclitus' Flux: God is in the world, being "day, night, winter, summer, war, peace." Moreover, some of the early Pre-Socratics conceived the Cosmos as being of the nature of a living organism.

In early Greek thought Zenophanes stands out more than anyone else. This Eleatic decried the anthropomorphism and polytheism in contemporary religion.

The Ethiopians make their Gods black and snub-nosed; the Thrasians say theirs have blue eyes and red hair.

"One God, the greatest among gods and men, neither in form unto mortals nor in thought." Yet, "He sees all

1 Cf. Plato's Timaeus.

2 No attempt will be made to evaluate the philosophy of all the Pre-Socratics. Only those who have a direct bearing on early Greek religion will be reviewed.

3 Solmsen, op. cit., p. 92.
over, thinks all over, and hears all over." Still, "without evil he swayeth all things by the thought of his mind," abiding in the same place, unmoving. 

Zenophanes, often called the "trampler of Homer," conceived of the unity of everything, that is the All-One. The All-One was his Deity, completely divested of all human qualities. His God was immanent in the world, and thus Zenophanes must be termed a Pantheist. 

It was thus his great achievement that he purified the idea of deity from the last vestiges of human defects and thus cleared the way for a deeper and more mature conception of God. "This philosophy of religion, which is based on the unity of the world and the inseparability of God and Nature, remains the chief merit of Zenophanes."

Like Zenophanes, Heraclitus started from the observations of nature and postulated the existence of deity from these conclusions. He found the essence of the world in a spiritual principle—the Logos. Heraclitus regarded this world-reason as bound up with the definite material substrate, fire. While Zenophanes' Deity was unchanging, it was the law of unceasing change that governed Heraclitus' deity. Things appear to be many, but they are One if one peers beneath the surface via the Logos. The One (fire) is in constant change, in perpetual flux, though there is unity and harmony in the strife of

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1Bertocci, op. cit., p. 11. 2Zeller, op. cit., p. 59. 3Ibid., p. 60.
opposites. This harmony is ordered by the principle of the Logos discernible only by Reason. Opposites pass into each other, being transformed by the eternal, uncreated fire.\(^1\) The soul of man is a part of the divine fire, the purer this fire is the more perfect the soul. Since the soul-fire is likewise subject to change, it must obtain enduring life from the light and air outside the body. When the soul leaves the body, it returned from whence it came, to the world-fire. Heraclitus' contribution to Plato's thinking lies in his pantheistic doctrine in which he states that God is an immanent spirit who creates nature, history, religion, law, and morality out of himself. The three fundamental ideas of this pantheism are unity, eternal change, and the inviolability of the laws of the world-order.\(^2\)

For Empedocles reality consisted of four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. None is reducible to the other or combined with them to form new substances. Empedocles conceived of two moving forces which brought about the mixture and separation of the elements. These he called Love and Hate. Love brings all elements together into a sphere and Hate causes separation. Change means rearrangement of elements, for there is no empty space. Thus, for Empedocles there are

\(^1\)Bertocci, op. cit., p. 10.

\(^2\)Zeller, op. cit., pp. 63-64.
six first principles. Empedocles believed, like Zenophanes, that the divinity was to be exalted above all human form and idea. God is a holy spirit which pervades the world with its thought and whose law governs everything. Wisdom, which is the highest attribute of God, is also the highest calling of man. "Happy is he who has gained the wealth of the divine opinion of the gods."\(^1\)

Anaxagoras, himself influenced by Parmenides and Anaximenes, rejected the mythical forces of Love and Hate which Empedocles used to explain motion. He thought that change could be only understood if there were a portion of everything in everything. The aspect which differentiates one thing from another represents a predominance of one type of "seed" in that particular mixture. Anaxagoras said there must be a single intellectual motive force of mind or *Nous*, which is corporeal and the only unmixed element, impeded by nothing else.\(^2\) *Nous* is absolutely simple; matter is composed of the "seeds." The *Nous* is a controlling force, pervading the whole cosmos, and active as soul and reason

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 76.

\(^2\)Commentators differ as to the exact attributes of Anaxagoras' *Nous*. Most authorities agree that he intended mind to be a truly incorporeal entity—a rational, thinking, almighty being. In practice, however, *Nous* remained a corporeal force, a *deux ex machina* which accounted for the formation of the world. See Burnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 309ff; Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

\(^3\)Kirk and Raven, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
in human bodies. Anaxagoras' chief service to philosophy was his belief that process is possible without change being possible. Nous is that which mixes the "seeds" to render the emergence of one thing from another.

On the whole, it can be said that the Pre-Socratics had developed a rational religion based on the principle of Mind out of the chaos that followed the breakdown of the Homeric and civic faiths. Plato was to take the rational element of the Pre-Socratic religion and combine it with an irrational element which sprang from human life. This irrational part of man's life found its most articulate formulation in the mystery-religions.

iv. The Mystery Religions

No study of the early movements in Greek religion would be complete unless something were said concerning the mystery-religions. When the Tragedians and Pre-Socratic philosophers had torn down the gods and religious practices of Homer, something less sophisticated had to fill this void in the hearts of the Greek citizens. As neither the tragedians nor the philosophers satisfied the needs of the common people, movements arose which stressed human imperfection and suffering, and offered release from this life in immortality and explained evil in this life through pre-existence and transmigration. To this movement is given the name of mystery religions.
The more well-known sects were the Orphic Cult, the Eleusinian Mysteries, the Pythagoreans, and the Empedoclean Speculations. Plato's philosophy of religion was probably more influenced by these cults and orders than by any other early movement. All of the mystery religions stressed an otherworldly existence and the importance of the soul. Consequently, Plato borrowed much from these ideas in his philosophy of the soul. 1 The distinction between body and soul was a basic dogma of the Greek mysteries. Speculations about man's fate after life, about transmigration, salvation and redemption centered upon this concept of the soul. Enough evidence seems to be available to demonstrate that in at least some of the mysteries the soul was considered man's immortal part, more precious than the body, and in some way much closer to the nature of the gods themselves. 2

The Orphic Cult with its emphasis on the immortal soul and eschatological themes and myths appears to have exerted a tremendous influence on Plato. "The Orphic societies maintained that the soul was divine in origin, incarnated as a punishment for some 'ancient woe,' and that it would return to god after a period of purification." 3 This well-known

1 *Infra*, Chapter V.  
2 *Solmsen, op. cit.*, p. 90.  
practice of purifying the soul was an ancient Eastern mystic doctrine, and was brought to Greece by the Orphic priests. The means of purification was a celebration in which the soul lost contact with the body under some strong external influence. This form of purification led to many of the infamous orgiastic debaucheries, but at their best these celebrations pointed up the separation between soul and body and the higher nature of the soul as it is vested in mind.

The Eleusinian Mysteries were not dissimilar to the Orphic Cult. The religious body of the Mysteries was a secret organization which promised immortality to those initiates who observed certain fasts and purification rituals. This concept of immortality involved little moral value and was motivated only by a desire to be with the departed.

The Pythagorean Order was directly influenced by Orphic mysticism. Its main contribution was its view of the purification and transmigration of the soul. Pythagoras was much impressed with the notion of purification in the older mysteries, and this he took as one of the central features of his teaching. For the Pythagoreans the aim of life was to be freed from the circle of births and to enter into the last, divine state of bliss. The road to this was of salvation lay through a strict systematic training in ascetic observances, daily self-examination, and severe mental discipline. The methods of purification of the Pythagoreans took the form of physical culture,
an attitude that recognized the need to free one's soul from the sensual bonds of the evil body. The idea of purification was later modified when it came to signify not a purification of the soul from bodily influences but a purification of the soul by Science and Music. The doctrine of transmigration was based on the Pythagorean idea of brotherhood. All living and organic beings were regarded as interrelated, since they were the embodiments of the soul-daemons. Something similar to the Wheel of Karma was employed by this order insofar as the form that each soul embodied depended upon the sort of life it had led previously. The highest grade of life was that of poet, physician, or prince. After such a life, the soul returned to the life of bliss it once possessed. One final contribution of the Pythagoreans which greatly influenced Plato was their philosophy of number. The nature of things is number. The theory of planetary movement and the harmony of spheres plus the harmony of music, geometry, and mathematics was ascribed to working out of the proper numerical relations inherent in these sciences. Thus it is seen that the great contribution of the Pythagoreans to the development of Plato's thought lay in the dualism of their philosophical system and in their great astronomical and mathematical discoveries.¹

The religion of Plato was influenced by a number of factors. Without the Olympian deities of Homer, Plato would have had neither myths nor gods as a background to posit his mature conception of a World-Soul, Demiurge, and demi-gods. Without the poets and tragedians, the spiritual and physical aspects of a deity would have been long in coming. The Pre-Socratics determined Plato's cosmological and teleological orientation and Socrates matured it. The mystery religions gave him a certainty that the gods are not wholly indifferent to human beings, and instilled in him the feeling of man's dependence on these gods. The over-all atmosphere of religious awe of the mystery religions became a part of Plato's own approach to the religious problem. 1

Plato was most indebted to early Greek religion for his philosophy of the soul, the concepts of immortality, pre-existence, and his mind-body dualism. To see how Plato synthesized these thoughts and began work on his own conception of God, an examination of Plato's doctrine of Ideas will now be undertaken as an harbinger to the philosophy of the soul.

1 Solmsen, op. cit., pp. 124, 126.
CHAPTER IV

GOD AND THE DOCTRINE OF IDEAS

1. The Doctrine of Ideas

The Doctrine of Ideas as developed by Plato was his reaction to a metaphysical and religious scepticism and solipsism that was current in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries B.C. The Milesian school of philosophy was the first to take up the baffling question of the nature of the physical world. Thales felt that the underlying substance was water; Anaximenes said air; and Anaximander posited the existence of an indefinite or infinite substance. Following these conceptions Parmenides conceived of the existence of the One, eternal and immovable. Heraclitus, on the other hand, insisted on the reality of change and stated that within the state of flux was a Logos, a balance or proportion, and attached a superior reality to fire. Combining the thought of his predecessors, Empedocles postulated four permanent elements—fire, air, water, and earth—and two principles of motion, attraction and repulsion.

Faced with all these conflicting theories, the Sophists of the Fifth Century despaired of ever achieving knowledge of the ultimate realities of life or of absolute standards. This belief was aptly stated in Protagoras' relativism. "Man is the
measure of all things," was the by-word of these sceptics. The Sophists continued to preach their doctrine of the relativity of knowledge down to the time of Plato, and it was in opposition to this hopeless scepticism that Plato insisted upon objective values. To realize a realm independent of man, Plato had to establish the existence of an objective, universally valid reality, and this he found in his Forms or Ideas.

1. Phaedo

Plato's theory of Ideas developed slowly out of the early Socratic dialogues, attained its mature expression in the Phaedo and Symposium, and reached its height in the Republic. Plato, upon mature reflection, reworked his doctrine, and the Parmenides is his final statement on the subject.

Statements are found in the Euthyphro that indicate a latent theory of Ideas, only uncovered enough to suggest the more complete doctrine that was soon to follow.

Remember then that I did not bid you teach me one or two out of many righteous things, but that Form itself which gives the quality of righteousness to things. For you agreed that it is through one Form that impious things are impious, righteous things righteous. Do you not remember?
Tell me then, what is the nature of this Form, so that by looking at it and using it as a pattern I may call righteous any action of yours or another's that is so, and say of whatever is not righteous that it is not.¹

In this dialogue Plato speaks of the Forms not as transcendentally existing, but as immanent in the particulars. He is still concerned with Socratic definition. Euthyphro is asked what all righteous actions "look like" so Socrates can identify them. From asking what all righteous actions look like to asking what it is they look like, which supposes the existence of something beyond them which they resemble, is but a step. Plato took this step between the Euthyphro and the Phaedo. Thus this little dialogue can be interpreted as the harbinger of the more complete statement to come in the Phaedo.

The Phaedo approaches the doctrine of Ideas first from the epistemological side, by discussing the unreliability of the senses. Socrates and Simmias are discussing the ability of the senses to grasp truth. Socrates concludes this dialectic as follows:

Have you ever grasped them with any other bodily sense? I refer to all such things as size, health, strength and in short to all other existent things, what each of them is. Is what is most true of these apprehended through the body, or is the following the case: whoever of us prepares himself best and most exactly to perceive each thing in itself will come nearest to knowing each thing?

¹Plato, Euthyphro, 6d.
without a body before it was in man's body, and must have had intelligence.\(^1\) In this discussion Plato offers a clear explanation of the difference between things and Ideas. Things are like the Ideas in that they participate in the eternal Ideas.\(^2\) The phenomenal particulars are apprehended through sense while the Ideas are perceived through the rational part of the pre-existent soul. The Ideal world is "that which is divine, deathless, intelligible, of one kind, indissoluble, always in the same way identical with itself."\(^3\) The proof of its existence follows logically from the doctrine of pre-existence.

Then may we not say, Simmias, that if, as we are always repeating, there is an absolute beauty, and goodness, and an absolute essence of all things; and if to this, which is now discovered to have existed in our former state, we refer all our sensations, and with this compare them, finding these ideas to be pre-existent and our inborn possession—then our souls must have had a prior existence, but if not, there would be no force in the argument? There is the same proof that these ideas must have existed before we were born, as that our souls existed before we were born; and if not the ideas, then not the souls.\(^4\)

The particular things which are those things that the body perceives are "human, mortal, varied in kind, unintelligible, soluble, never in any way identical with themselves."\(^5\)

After he has made the distinction between those things which the soul perceives in its pre-existent state, that is,

\(^1\)Ibid., 76b. \(^2\)Ibid., 100c. \(^3\)Ibid., 80b.
\(^4\)Ibid., 78c. \(^5\)Ibid., 80b.
the Ideas, and the things that the mortal body apprehends, Plato establishes the relationship between the two.

It seems to me that if anything is beautiful apart from beauty itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than because it partakes of that beauty.

Now I do not know and cannot understand those other wise reasons. And if any one tells me why anything is beautiful, either because it has a blooming colour or shape or any other such thing, I leave all that out, for I get confused by all those other reasons, but simply and ignorantly and perhaps foolishly I say to myself that nothing else makes things beautiful but the presence of that beauty we spoke of, or its company or however it is that it comes to be there. I am not dogmatic as to the manner of its presence but I insist that it is through beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful. For that seems to me the safest answer to make both to myself and to others, and if I hold on to this I do not think I shall stumble; it is safe for me or any one else to answer that beautiful things become beautiful through beauty.¹

By insisting that beauty in a particular object must be explained in relation to the Idea of beauty, Plato is suggesting that we cannot give a satisfactory explanation of any particular thing without connecting it with other things that belong to the same class. If the universal can be grasped, we will be able to give an intelligible account of the particular instance of it. That is, the Ideas, which are now present by definition in a certain particular, are its properties; those which are not always present in a particular are accidents. At this stage of the theory of Ideas, Plato uses eidos and idea in the sense of Idea or Form.² The particular always

¹Ibid., 82a. ²Ibid., 103e.
participates in its Idea, otherwise it would cease to be what it is.

Plato employs a kind of ontological argument to arrive at the existence of the Ideas in the *Phaedo*. Such perfect knowledge that the philosopher seeks demands the separation of the soul from the body and thus life after death. But attainment of knowledge in this life necessitates that the soul already have knowledge. Thus the doctrine of recollection implies that the soul has a previous existence. Plato illustrates this point with the concept of equality. In the sensory world we never find perfect equality. But is not perfect equality supposed when two sticks are compared and found to be equal? The question asked is how can we know perfection or imperfection unless we already have an ideal of the perfect standard by which to judge it. Material objects fall short of perfection, so the concept of perfection must be prior to them. The ideal is itself prior to all particular examples of it. This higher level or ideal of equality must be known before we were born, so that learning is the recollection of Ideas possessed in a prior state. If this is true, then our souls have existed in a prior state also. Such reasoning necessitates an independent realm of Eternal Forms or Ideas. Thus Plato arrives at the existence of the Ideas

\[1\] Ibid., 74ff.
by assuming that the conception of perfection must be preceded by the existence of perfection.

In summary of the doctrine of Ideas as presented in the *Phaedo* the following points have been developed. First, there are realities such as goodness, beauty, equality, and the like which are absolutely true but cannot be perceived by the bodily senses. They are grasped only through the reasoning faculty of the mind, freed as far as possible from the errors of sense. There are ideas of everything possible—of things, qualities, and relations, of the good and the beautiful as well as the bad and ugly. Second, Plato says that this faculty of the mind is chronologically prior to the body and thus is aware of the enduring truths even before the birth of the body. He argues this fact from the pre-existence of the soul, which makes knowledge of the Forms possible. The Ideas are then remembered through the objects of sense. Thus the doctrine of Reminiscence explains how the mind apprehends the Ideas and how the Ideas differ from the particular manifestations of them. Third, the Ideas are unique, stable, and eternal, in contrast to the changing, temporal nature of the particulars. This difference between the two is the difference between qualities apprehended through the intellect and those concrete objects perceived through the senses. The gulf created between them later was to offer Plato much difficulty, and a modified form of this doctrine had to be developed. Finally,
by virtue of their characteristic, the Ideas alone can lead to a satisfactory theory of causation in which each particular thing is considered as a member of a specific class, the common qualities of which compose the abstract essence of its Idea. No particular thing can be considered in isolation. It has to be brought into a class of which the common elements can be understood. These common elements, considered abstractly, are what Plato calls the Ideas. Thus, the Ideas are the necessary principles without which the particulars would have no meaning or existence. The Forms can be variously present in the particulars, but the contrary Forms cannot be participated in by the same particular.

ii. Republic

It is not until the fifth book of the Republic that Plato continues his theory of Ideas. In connection with the possibility of converting his theoretical city into a practical actuality Plato is challenged to explain the role of the philosopher. It is here that Socrates resorts to the theory of Ideas. The philosopher is that man who has perfect knowledge of the best in himself and the best worth living for. Plato's conception of the dictum that knowledge is virtue includes not only knowledge of the good man, but also of Good itself, the final cause of all that is good in the universe and of its own existence. Few men reach this goal, but those who do are expected to rule—they are Plato's philosopher-kings.
It matters little that this ideal state is not realizable on earth. The ideal state or man is the true state or man. The realm of ideals is the real world, unchanging and eternal, which can be known by thought.\(^1\) Thus if an Ideal world exists, it can be apprehended only by one who, by means of knowledge and wisdom, perceives the Good itself. These philosophers desire knowledge of the whole truth and reality, hence of the world of essential Forms, in contrast with the world of appearances.\(^2\) It is ordinary men who grasp at particular sights and sounds and call this reality. Of the real nature of things, they have no conception. These people confuse the particular beautiful things, which are so only insofar as they participate in beauty, with beauty itself. But it is the philosopher who has knowledge of reality, of the Forms. Ordinary men have only beliefs about the physical world; the philosopher has knowledge of the Ideal world. Thus it is the philosopher who must rule the state because he alone has the pattern of the good in his soul which he tries to realize in the lives of men. He must have the highest kind of knowledge, which is the knowledge of the Good.

But what is the Good? Socrates answers this question by drawing a parallel between the sun and the Idea of the Good.

\(^1\)Plato, *Republic*, 471e. \(^2\)Ibid., 473a.
It is the sun which I call the offspring of the good, made by the good in its own likeness to bear the same relation to sight and the objects seen in the physical world as the good itself, in the intelligible world, bears to mind and to what is known.

You know that our eyes become dim and almost blind when we turn them upon objects of which the colours are no longer decked with the sunlight but with the gleam of night, as if sight were no longer present in us.

But when the sun shines we see distinctly and sight seems to inhabit those same eyes.

Understand then the same to take place in the mind. Whenever the mind is directed to something illumined by truth and reality, it knows this and understands it and thus appears gifted with intelligence. But when directed to what is mixed with darkness, what is subject to birth and destruction, the mind is dimmed, has only beliefs which change this way and that, and seems to have no intelligence.

Then that which adds truth to the object of knowledge and gives the knowing subject the power to know, consider this to be the Idea of good. As it is the cause of knowledge and of truth, so think of it also as being apprehended by knowledge. And although both knowledge and truth are beautiful, this other you will rightly consider more beautiful than they. As yonder light and sight are rightly called sun-like but should not be thought to be the sun, so here it is right to call both knowledge and truth good-like, but to identify either with the good is wrong, for goodness must be honoured even more than these.¹

In the physical world it is the sun from which we derive light, sight, and the eye that sees; in the intelligible world we have the Good from which we derive truth, knowledge and the mind that knows. Just as the sun is the cause of sight and existence on the physical plane, the Good is the cause of everything's being and being known in the world of Ideas.

Plato continues in the Republic to make his meaning

clear as to the relation of the Ideas to the particulars and the higher nature of the Idea of the Good. This is known as Plato's Divided Line Theory.

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<th>Objects</th>
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<td>The Good</td>
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<td>Forms (Ideas)</td>
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<td>Mathematical Objects</td>
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<td>Visible Things</td>
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The line is first divided into two parts, the upper part representing the intelligible world, and the lower the visible world. Within each division is an additional division symbolizing further degrees of comparative reality and existence. The objects of cognition begin with the lowest form of perception, that of images pictured in the mind. These images of the actual world give way to visible things which are known through a belief concerning the substantial nature of the world. In the moral realm it would include "correct beliefs without knowledge." Crossing the line man is first made aware of the realities of mathematical objects and then the various Forms through thinking, a state of knowledge that implies a degree of understanding which falls just short of perfect knowledge. Finally, the Good can be apprehended.
in all its glory. This perfect Form is only apprehended through the Dialectic. The Dialectic is an intellectual process by which the mind grasps the supreme Form through an inductive examination of the lower Forms. Having viewed the Good, the mind can then descend by deduction and confirm the whole structure of moral and mathematical knowledge.¹

The final illustration of the epistemic quality of the doctrine of Ideas is found in the allegory of the cave. The parable shows the ascent of man's mind from the unenlightened state of imagining, which is represented by the prisoner watching the shadows of reality as reflected on a screen, to the actual knowledge of the Good which is apprehended by coming out of the cave and seeing the sun in its full, unreflected radiance.

The Ideas form a world which exists of itself. They are eternal and unchanging, and can only be completely comprehended by thought. In this pure and independent state they have their abode, where the soul in its pre-existence perceived them. All learning and knowledge consists in the recollection by the soul of the Ideas when it perceives the things of sense. The earthly and sensually perceptible things are mere shadowy images of the bright world of Ideas, which can be apprehended only by the philosopher. This resume of the doctrine of Ideas in the Republic finds its clearest and most emphatic expression in the above simile of the cave in book seven.²

¹Ibid., 509-510. ²Zeller, op. cit., p. 148.
iii. Parmenides

A thorough criticism of his theory of Ideas appears in Plato’s later dialogue, *Parmenides*. Here Plato lists five objections to his theory and these objections constitute an attack on the doctrine as strong as any later critic was to inflict. First, are there Forms for such things as fire, water, hair, mud, and sealing wax? Can the whole Form be present in different objects of sense and still remain one? If it does not retain its unity, we are left with a plurality and the original difficulty is transferred from the phenomenal world to the intelligible world. Third, if one Idea is postulated to account for the fact that a big thing is big because it participates in bigness, then how explain the bigness of the Idea? Must there not be a "third man" to account even for the predicate of the Form? If the Ideas are conceived as patterns which things "resemble" and "imitate" or to which they are "assimilated," then why not a copy of the copy ad infinitum? If the copy and the original are alike, they have a common character, but there is just as much reason to posit another Form for the original and the copy to partake of in regard to their likeness, as there was to posit the original Form of which all the copies partake.¹ Fourthly, the Ideas exist in nature as patterns or models and things must participate in them merely by being made like them. Again, the

¹Bertocci, op. cit., p. 63.
"third man" criticism is relevant. Finally, if the Ideas are not of our world, then they must be totally separated from us and there can be no connection between the two. How can the objects then be objects of knowledge?¹

There would seem to be a need for an Idea of everything in the sense world, but if this were taken literally, it would become absurd. Are there eternal Ideas for such things as hair, clay, mud, and sealing wax? Socrates readily admits mathematical Ideas and moral Ideas, but confesses uncertainty as to Ideas of man, fire and water, though there is no difficulty in regarding them as such. However, when he is confronted with such undignified things as hair and mud, Socrates is repelled and doubts there are forms of such things. But when the Ideas become too objective to human knowledge, an unbridged gap arises between the Ideas and the apprehending mind. Hence the Parmenides leaves Plato with certain disturbing questions. Exactly what is the content and extent of the realm of eternal Ideas? If the Ideas are neither objective nor subjective, just what is their status? However, one thing still remains clear, if the doctrine of Ideas be rejected, then knowledge is impossible. It is not until the Timaeus that Plato offers a theory of Ideas that harmonizes with the criticisms mentioned above and with his later modified

¹Plato, Parmenides, 126a-136c.
philosophy. The doctrine of Ideas will be mentioned again in connection with the cosmology of the Timaeus.

It must be remembered that the theory of Ideas was intended to resolve the necessity for a permanent realm distinct from the sensible world of change without denying the reality of the sensible world. Plato did provide for the existence of an universal realm and kept the status of the sensible world. But the problems he encountered required a revision of the basic concepts on how the supra-sensual is manifested in the sensual.

2. God and the Good

Having discussed the doctrine of Ideas as it developed through Plato's works, it is now time to relate the supreme Idea of the Good with the notion of God. This discussion is taken mainly from the Republic as it is in this dialogue that most of the ethical significance of the Ideas is presented. The thought of the Laws will be introduced in conclusion as a statement of Plato's final view of the relation of the Good and his conception of God.

i. The Metaphysical Aspects of the Good in the Republic

The language of the Republic leads one to ask the question whether Plato does indeed identify the Good with God. The Good is the cause of everything's being and being known. It is the supreme value and the source of all other existence.
It is, as it were, "beyond being." God, on the other hand, is not a form, but a soul, the supremely good soul. \(^1\) "The deity is morally immutable but not immutability, perfectly true and good, but not truth itself or goodness itself. Almost, in one place (Rep. 509b), Plato absorbs God into the Idea of Goodness, but not quite."\(^2\) It is precisely because God is not a Form that He can play such a role as Plato assigns him in the *Timaeus*. God is an intermediary being who, inspired by the eternal Forms, constructs and regulates as far as possible the details of the visible world under the guidance of that inspiration. The Good of the *Republic* is comparable to the Christian metaphysical God, but not to Plato's conception of God as it later is developed in the *Timaeus* and *Laws*. The metaphysical Good set the standard for moral and aesthetic aspiration and activity. God, on the other hand, is going to have his eye on this Good as he creates the universe. Therefore the God of the *Republic* is that religious spirit which partakes of the esse of the Good,\(^3\) and will in his creation convert it into concrete essentia in the *Timaeus*. Taylor temporally resolves the dilemma of confusing God with

\(^1\) God as Soul will be treated in Chapter V.

\(^2\) More, op. cit., p. 316.

\(^3\) Taylor, op. cit., p. 239, feels that the germ of the *Republic* suggests that God and the Good are not as yet distinct entities. At this stage of Plato's thinking, God and the Good correspond to the Christian metaphysical God, and nothing else.
the Good by saying that it was "really an unsolved conflict between the Platonic metaphysics and the Platonic religion." ¹

If one views the ideas of the Republic from the vantage point of the Laws, it is possible to think of God as the efficient cause and the Good as the formal cause. The formal cause needs the efficient cause in order to be realized. This would eliminate much of the confusion surrounding the Good and God in the Republic, but at the expense of interpreting Plato in Aristotelian terms.

At this point of Plato's treatment of God, it can only be said that Plato was more concerned with his metaphysical Ideas than with any religious exposition. The philosophers of his state will strive to know the idea of the Good which is the source of every particular good. God is merely a developing concept that enters Plato's metaphysical thought more fully as he departs from his ethical considerations and begins serious thought concerning his cosmology.

ii. The Religious Aspects of God in the Republic

In book two of the Republic Plato makes the statement that God is good and not therefore responsible for evil. ² It is interesting to note that the proposition, "God is good," is laid down as given. No attempt is made to prove it. The two terms simply belong together. In the Republic Plato

still holds to a critical acceptance of the polytheistic religion of Homer. But he is beginning to question the characteristics of these gods. At this point Plato is not specifically interested in proving the existence of his own conception of the gods; rather, he is concerned with disproving various contemporary notions about the gods, that is, the view that the gods are responsible for evil. Plato says nothing that is good can be harmful; if it can do no harm, it can do no evil. Goodness is responsible only for things that are as they should be, not for any evil. The divine, being good, can will only the good; the cause of evil in the world must be laid elsewhere. This is Plato's first principle of religion. If God is divine goodness then he cannot change, for any change would be for the worse, and it has already been shown that God is only good and not bad. Then God is perfect—as perfect as he can be, always remaining in his own Form. This is the second religious principle. Finally, there is no falsehood in the divine nature. Because God is good, because he is unchanging, and because he is not unaware of the past, there is no reason why he should lie to mortals. Thus as a final principle, it must be said that God does not transform himself by any magic or mislead mortals by telling them lies.

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1Plato, Republic, p. 378.  2Ibid., p. 379.  3Ibid.
In conclusion to this chapter, the difference of approach Plato takes when discussing these concepts of God and the Good should be noted. The doctrine of Ideas as developed in the Republic is a metaphysical notion; the concept of the gods is a religious one. God is not the Good, but one must look to the Timaeus to realize the distinction between the two most clearly. It will then be seen that God is good in his creation, and that he looks ever to the eternal, the changeless model. Thus the Ideas become in a sense objective to God. It has already been pointed out that the Good is the chief characteristic of God, and later it will be seen that God is self-limited because he is good—not that he makes the Good, but that it is a condition which he cannot in his nature violate.

This thesis is both a logical development of Plato's conception of God as well as a chronological one. Just as it is important to demonstrate how Plato's Ideas were born, grew, and matured throughout his dialogues, so it is equally important to point out the logical sequence of his theory of God. Plato said in the Phaedo that if one grant him the existence of the Forms, he could deduce and show why the soul is immortal. The organization of this thesis is governed in part by this reasoning. Having stated Plato's theory of Ideas and related it to his embryonic religion, it is now time to turn

1H. R. Lewis, op. cit., p. 63. 2Plato, Phaedo, 100b.
to Plato's treatment of the immortality of the soul which forms the basis for his further statement and conception of God.
CHAPTER V

GOD AND THE SOUL

It has been stated in Chapter IV that Forms or Ideas exist which are realities beyond the sensual world. From these supra-sensual Forms Plato was able to posit an objective realm which informs this world of particulars. The concept of God does not correspond to the Ideas, but Plato suggests that given the world of Forms, he can formulate his psychology and thereby introduce his conception of God. Chapter V is concerned with the task of establishing the being of the soul, its immortality, and its consequent relation to the being and existence of God.

1. The Being of the Soul

In early Greek thought the word psyche primarily meant the principle of life in any being. Whatever is alive must possess psyche. In everyday usage the word took on rather vague meanings until by Plato's time the psyche was merely the harmonious arrangement of bodily parts. The possibility of the soul being immortal was not raised until the time of Socrates, and it was given definitive formulation by Plato. True, a belief in immortality did exist in early times, and

1Grube, op. cit., p. 120.
that part of man that survived death was called the psyche. But it must be pointed out that life after death was but a shadowy counterpart of full-blooded life on earth. There is no suggestion that the soul is spiritual or in any way man's highest or noblest part.\(^1\) It is doubtful that the soul of man in early Greek religion was any different in kind or quality from the body that perishes at death.

The conception of the soul as man's highest part was imported to Greece by the Eastern mystery religions, primarily by the Orphics. Immortality was seen as a release from life and a deliverance. The purification rituals of these mystery cults were designed to prepare the soul for its final absorption back into the being of the divine. The Pythagoreans, themselves influenced by the Orphics, conceived of the immortal soul as the intellectual power of man, and the intellect thus became the highest part of man. Plato was to be tremendously influenced by this Pythagorean notion of associating the intellect with the immortal soul. Salvation through knowledge is clearly expressed in the Phaedo, and this concept remains with Plato to the end. So often were the activities of the soul associated with the intellect that mind is many times far more suitable a translation of psyche than soul.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 121. \(^2\)Ibid., p. 122.
The early Socratic dialogues are concerned with establishing the need to consider the soul as that faculty which directs men's lives by ruling or controlling the body and its passions. The clearest and simplest statement of this famous ministration of the soul is found in the *Charmides*. Socrates exhorts Charmides to tend to the health of his soul if he wishes to cure his headache. Referring to one of the Thracian doctors who told him of this cure, Socrates says:

He said that everything good and evil in the body and in the whole man originated in the soul and spread thence as from the head to the eyes. The soul then should be our first and our greatest care, if the head and the rest of the body is to be well. And, my friend, he said the soul must be tended by incantations, and that these incantations are beautiful conversations. From such conversations self-control and moderation arise in men's souls, and once they are present it is easy to bring health to the head and the rest of the body.

This dialogue demonstrates that physical health is dependent upon the health of the soul, and relief from Charmides' headache can only come by way of treatment of his soul. In the *Gorgias* the essential inferiority of the body is mentioned, and at the end of this dialogue there appears a myth that suggests the immortality of the soul. This myth of the day of judgment is a figure of two men who have a number of casks to fill; one, a temperate man, has a jar that will hold what is placed in it, while the other, who is intemperate, tries

1Plato, *Charmides*, 156b.  
2Plato, *Gorgias*, 493e.
to fill a sieve.\textsuperscript{1} But here, as in all Socrates' exhortations to the good life, his ethics is in no way dependent upon the soul being immortal, and his ethical system stands even if such immortality be denied. Thus, the myth of the Gorgias is an addendum, not an argument.\textsuperscript{2} It can be deduced, then, that in the early period of his writing, Plato was not primarily concerned with treating the belief in an immortal soul as a main argument; he included these arguments only as an added inducement to the good life professed by Socrates. In these early dialogues the soul is to be considered as distinct from the body and definitely possessing a higher position than the body. The soul also possesses the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, which in its application can affect the conduct of human life. However, no systematic presentation of the nature of the soul appears in these Socratic treatises; all that is said is that there is a unity persisting through change making ethical judgments possible.

2. The Doctrine of Immortality

1. \textit{Meno}

In the \textit{Meno}, Plato suggests that knowledge is possible because the mind was not ignorant at birth. The mind has

\textsuperscript{1}Grube, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 124. \textsuperscript{2}Plato, \textit{Meno}, 71ff.
latent ideas in it of universal truths and realities (the Forms) which it has known in an earlier existence. He demonstrates this fact by drawing knowledge out of a slave boy who seemed to be ignorant of the knowledge Socrates revealed that he possessed.¹ Socrates argues that if there had always been true thoughts in the slave boy, which only had to be awakened into knowledge by putting questions to him, his soul must have always possessed this knowledge. And if the truth of all things always existed in the soul, then the soul is immortal.² In this dialogue Plato says that knowledge is only possible through recollection, and recollection necessitates the existence of the soul prior to its earthly existence. Here, then, is Plato's first doctrine of immortality, a theory that will be explained and given more systematic formulation in the Phaedo.

ii. Phaedo

The subject under discussion in the Phaedo is the immortality of the soul. In this dialogue Plato is intent upon a formal presentation of this doctrine. In the Phaedo recollection appears again, but this time not in mythical form. Rather, it appears in connection with the theory of Ideas which enables Socrates to express his belief in the

¹Plato, Meno, 71ff. ²Ibid., 80b.
kinship of the human soul with the world of thought.

Plato sets the stage for his four proofs of the soul's immortality by showing why the soul requires a previous existence. The ultimate concern of the philosopher is to free himself from the world of sense and contemplate the essence of things. In order to do this he must separate his soul from mere bodily desires and seek perfect knowledge of the eternal objects. Here the soul is a unity, possessing no other characteristic than reason or intellect. Pitted against it at every turn is the body with its sensual pleasures, passions and desires. The way to withdraw from these bodily affections is to contemplate the Ideas which one must have known in a previous existence. If the philosopher can recollect these Ideas, then the soul must have existed prior to its present embodiment. This belief in the immortal soul Plato supports with four arguments.¹

1. The first argument for the immortality of the soul is based on rebirth.² Socrates says there is a belief that the soul goes from this existence to another world, and from there it returns to this world. This illustrates the principle that all things are born from their opposites, that is, hot from cold; great from small; and good from bad. Living souls

¹These four arguments are taken from Grube's analysis of the Phaedo, op. cit., pp. 126-29.

²Plato, Phaedo, 70c-72a.
come from souls that are dead and dead souls from the living. If the principle did not continue, there would be no becoming; life would ultimately perish; and there would be only a dead universe left. That is, if all souls changed in one direction only, they would die the death of the body and there would be no souls to exist in other bodies. Therefore, the soul existed before its present existence, and will continue to live after the death of the material body. Socrates is much indebted to Heraclitus and the Pythagoreans for this notion of opposites. It would appear that this first argument was not intended to stand by itself because Socrates himself later discards the principle of universal cyclical recurrence.\(^1\)

Perhaps this initial argument serves as a forerunner to the argument from opposites that appears again in the *Republic*.

2. The second argument is based on the doctrine of recollection.\(^2\) If one admits that the Forms exist and that knowledge is the recollection of the Forms (see the *Meno*), then the soul must have existed before birth to have been able to apprehend these Forms. And, on the strength of the first argument, it must follow that if the soul existed before birth, it must exist after death.

Thus far we have found that the soul of man exists prior to the body and leads and rules the body. Secondly, by means

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\(^1\)Taylor, op. cit., p. 186.  
\(^2\)Plato, *Phaedo*, 72e-77d.
of the doctrine of opposites Socrates states that the soul does not die upon the death of the body. Rather, it must journey from death to life as well as from life to death. Finally, in that the soul is capable of apprehending the eternal and immutable Ideas through recollection, it must have existed in the eternal realm, and, as we shall presently observe, partake of the nature of these Forms.

3. The third argument is based almost solely on the doctrine of Ideas.\(^1\) Granted the existence of the Forms, there must be two kinds of existence; the one of simple, eternal, unchanging Forms; the other of composite particulars which are mortal and everchanging. The first is divine and the other is not. The soul is akin to the Forms because it rules over the body and apprehends the Ideas. As such the soul is similar to the divine. "The soul, then, is relatively the permanent and divine thing in us, the body the merely human and mutable. We should therefore expect the body to be relatively perishable, the soul to be either wholly imperishable or nearly so."\(^2\)

4. The final argument for the immortality of the soul in the Phaedo follows an interchange between Cebes and Socrates on the perishability of the soul.\(^3\) There are certain things

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\(^1\)Ibid., 78b-84b.  
\(^2\)Taylor, op. cit., p. 191.  
\(^3\)Plato, Phaedo, 102a-107b.
which are themselves not Ideas, but of which participation in a given form is an essential character. A particular thing not only participates in its own Form, but also in any other Form that is essential to it. However, it cannot participate in a Form which is opposite to any property it contains. For example, three not only contains the Form of threeness, but also that of oddness. It cannot contain the Form of evenness or fourness. In the same way, whatever has soul has life. Life is thus a necessary component of soul, and consequently, death which is the opposite of life cannot be a property of soul. If life is always predicated of the soul, then death can never be predicated of it. The soul is, in the literal sense of the word, undying. A dead soul would be a contradiction in terms. This final argument rests on an ambiguity in the word, deathless. Socrates tried to equate deathless with indestructible. If the word "indestructible" were used in place of "deathless," the proper conclusion to the argument would be not that the soul is immortal; rather, that soul and death are two mutually exclusive terms. When a man dies, his soul goes on living, or ceases to live at all. Socrates' view is that the soul withdraws or retires from the body at death. Because Greek religion equated deathlessness, indestructibility and the divine, he felt no need to go further on this point. Socrates himself gives the last word on this
argument by saying that the proofs of the immortality of the soul really demands further examination.¹

In the Phaedo the force of the argument rests on the relation of the soul to the Ideas. The Ideas are eternal, and hence, the soul that shares in them, recalls them and resembles them, must also be eternal. The soul here presented is essentially the mind and the intellect and is that which stands in direct opposition to the body with its passions and pleasures. The teaching of the Phaedo can be thought of as an intellectual attempt to sever the soul from the untrustworthy guides of the senses, and to allow it to attain truth through knowledge of the essences of things. But this is Plato’s first word on the subject, not his last. From this initial statement to the effect that the soul is primarily intellect, Plato gradually develops the soul into all of man that is not sheer physical matter. And in the Timaeus even that matter loses its solidity.

iii. Republic and Phaedrus²

A gradual transition takes place in Plato’s thought after the writing of the Phaedo. Whereas in the Phaedo Plato considered the soul as being intellect, he modified this view in the Symposium, Republic, and Phaedrus. In the Symposium the

¹Taylor, op. cit., p. 206.
²The organization of the argument in the Republic and the Phaedrus is taken from Grube, op. cit., pp. 130-40.
concept of immortality is not only unmentioned, it is all but denied. Emotion, feeling, and spirit are introduced as the components of the soul, and the intellect is hardly referred to. Here Plato is concerned with the nature of Eros. Diotima describes the nature of love as the son of Poverty and Plenty, as the mediator and messenger between God and man. Love seeks the possession of the good. Diotima then goes on to describe how one attains the realization of the Form of Beauty through the process of growth in the acquisition of knowledge and love of Beauty. In the Symposium, then, the concept of the Form of Beauty is a cognition of a perfect Beauty independent of our minds. This Form is apprehended by the demi-god Eros who bridges the gap between the noetic and the physical worlds. In the Phaedo, understanding of the Ideas came through an intellectual study, but in the Symposium Plato explains the way to the Forms by means of the psychic activity of Eros which lives in the souls of men. It is in the Republic that Plato reconciles the two views of the Phaedo and the Symposium.

In book four of the Republic Plato discusses his psychology of the soul. He had already established the three parts of the state and he concludes that because of the close connection

1 Plato, Symposium, 206c-8c.
2 Ibid., 202e.
3 Ibid., 210a.
4 Ibid., 209c.
between social and individual psychology there also must exist a correspondence between the state and the human soul.¹

The three parts of the soul are the reason, the appetite, and the feelings. It is the reason that must rule the other two less rational parts.

And it will be the business of reason to rule with wisdom and forethought on behalf of the entire soul; while the spirited element ought to act as its subordinate and ally. The two will be brought into accord, as we said earlier, by that combination of mental and bodily training which will tune up one string of the instrument and relax the other, nourishing the reasoning part on the study of noble literature, and allaying the other’s wildness by harmony and rhythm. When both have been thus nurtured and trained to know their own true functions, they must be set in command over the appetites, which form the greater part of each man’s soul and are by nature insatiably covetous.²

Paralleling the same concept in the state, the reason in the individual corresponds to the ruler class in the city, the feelings to the soldiers, and the appetites to the rest of the people.³

The same tripartite division of the soul is found in the figure of a charioteer and two horses, in pursuit of beauty, in the Phaedrus.⁴ Plato describes the image of the three parts of the soul as a team of two horses and a charioteer. The charioteer (representing reason) strives to control the steeds. Two horses, one good (spirited element) and one bad (appetites) drag the charioteer around the heavens resisting his control.

¹Plato, Republic, 435. ²Ibid., 441. ³Ibid., 440. ⁴Plato, Phaedrus, 246-253.
The division of the soul into three parts is a very great advance over the treatment given it in the *Phaedo*. In the *Phaedo* Plato talks only of three different types of men; in the *Republic* and *Phaedrus* these become three parts of the same soul. In his analogy between the soul of man and the composition of the state, Plato is hinting at the unity he desires in the state by showing the similarities between the perfect state of justice and the unified soul of man. When Plato again turns to discuss the immortality of the soul in Book Ten of the *Republic*, it is quite evident that he must modify his views of the *Phaedo* in light of the above discussion of the three parts of the soul.

Briefly summarized, the argument in favor of the immortality of the soul in the *Republic* is as follows: everything has some particular evil condition which tends to destroy it and if one can find something that cannot be destroyed by its own particular evil and be conditioned only by its essence, it will be indestructible.¹ The soul's particular evil is moral evil. Moral evil does not in fact cause death. The dissolution of the body is caused by the body's peculiar evils, but these cannot harm the soul. Plato concludes the argument by repeating the argument from opposites which he developed in the *Phaedo*.²

¹This is in distinction from that thing's particular excellence which constitutes its essential nature.

²Plato, *Republic*, 608-611.
The argument that evil cannot kill the soul is not persuasive for a number of reasons. It implies a decided separation between body and soul which is not mentioned elsewhere in the Republic. There is also a question as to whether all three parts of the soul are immortal, or if not, which part is. Plato recognizes these deficiencies in his argument, but does not attempt to resolve them at this time. He says:

That the soul is immortal is proved by our present argument and others. But its true nature we must not examine in its present state, harmed as it is by communion with the body and other evils, but such as it is when pure; in that state it should be considered by our mind and to find that is to find also a clearer examination of the just and the unjust and all we have spoken of.1

Thus it can be seen that when Plato comes to consider his arguments for the immortality of the soul in light of his more advanced psychology in the Republic, he must re-evaluate some of his former concepts. Now that the soul is conceived to be a multiplicity of parts and functions, the earlier arguments based on the simple and uniform nature of the soul and its kinship with the Forms no longer holds. Plato then offers a new argument, that of the characteristic evil of each thing, but he realizes that this does not dispose of the question of what part of the soul is immortal. The problem is too large to be taken up in the concluding part of the Republic, so discussion is suspended until the Timaeus. The problem is not made any clearer in the Phaedrus.

1 Ibid., 611b.
In conjunction with the mythical passage of the charioteer and his team a further passage is introduced. The soul is the originator of all movement, and therefore of all life. This principle becomes very important in the works of the later period.

All soul is immortal. For that which is ever in motion is immortal. That which moves something else and is moved by something else, when its motion ends, then also ends its life. That alone which moves itself, since it never fails, never ceases to move, but is the source and beginning of motion for all other things that move. For the beginning never came to be. And from the beginning all that comes to be is born, whereas itself it derives from none. For if the beginning was born of something else, it would no longer be the beginning.

And since it did not become, neither will it be destroyed. For if the first principle were destroyed it could not again be derived from anything else nor could anything else be derived from it, if indeed all things are derived from a first principle. Thus the first beginning of motion is that which moves itself.¹

The immortality of the soul is the first principle of motion as well as being the origin of all life, for without soul, there would be no life. Life and motion are equivalent terms, and the soul, as the power which moves itself without external stimulus, is the sole origin of them both. The argument here expounded is reproduced again in the Laws. Unlike the arguments in the Phaedo, it has no special connection with the Ideas. The soul is self-moving or self-determined, and, therefore, immortal. It does not derive its immortality from the fact that it shares in the idea of life or in the Forms, but from the fact that as self-moving, it is itself the principle

¹Plato, Phaedrus, 245c-46e.
of life and of all substantial reality.

iv. **Timaeus**

A second transition takes place in Plato's concept of the soul with the writing of the *Sophist* and *Politicus*. In the *Sophist* Plato endows the world with a living soul.\(^1\) In the myth of the *Sophist* the world is like a living creature, possessed of a soul as well as a body. This soul is dependent upon the guidance of a god, and unable to carry on by itself. In this short myth Plato makes the transition from the soul existing in the being of man to the concept of soul existing in the cosmos. Thus far all he has said is that the world is dependent upon a force outside itself. The "soul of the universe" that is found in the *Sophist* endows the whole universe with life, "and just as our bodies are nurtured by the matter of the outside universe and are part of its body, the same is true of the relation between our soul and the world soul."\(^2\)

As has been demonstrated in the *Phaedrus*, the soul is the cause of motion, and within it resides the mind. Mind is the efficient cause of all that exists in the cosmos and must be prior to all phenomena.\(^3\) In this dialogue Plato expands the notion of the soul to include all aspects of life, made possible by the tripartite division of the soul explained in

\(^3\)Cf. the treatment of Anaxagoras' concept of *Nous* in Chapter III.
The entire theory of the soul is fully restated in the Timaeus. The world is a living being, endowed with a soul and mind. The soul pervades the universe and is prior to matter. Soul, therefore, is once again the beginning or first principle of life. The creation of the soul is described in three stages. First, there is being in the physical world, followed by being in the intelligible world of Forms. A third being, a mixed being, is made from the other two. The Craftsman who fashions this mixed-being then combines the three mixtures into a blend which is the soul. The whole narrative of creation in the Timaeus is written in mythical form, but it is clear enough that Plato is trying to establish some connection between the soul of man and the world soul. By means of the process through which the soul of man is formed, that is, the formation of Sameness and Otherness from Being, the soul can make judgments both about the objects of sense and the objects of thought, about the physical and the intelligible world. It is, therefore, the function of the mind to act as a bridge between the two worlds. Thus the soul contains within itself Being, Same and Other as they exist in both worlds. The notion of the correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm is further developed.

1Plato, Timaeus, 30b-35c; 65c; 77b.
2Grube, op. cit., p. 142.
The soul of the universe is arranged in two circles, that of Same and that of Other. The correspondence between the World-Soul and the soul of man is effected by their affinity to the Platonic astronomical and mathematical basis of Being. Not only are they both made of the same ingredients, but human souls are also divided into circles of Same and Other which have their spherical motions within the head. It is by an understanding of the motions and rhythm of the universe that man can best induce within himself the appropriate motions of his intelligence.¹

The above discussion is relevant only to the rational part of the soul, which Plato explicitly indicates to be the only immortal part. All of the other faculties perish with the body. Thus the question left unanswered in the Republic is now settled. The intellect alone is immortal and the divine part of the soul. It is this part of the soul that is akin to the gods. This highest part of the human soul is almost more than human.

As regards the most important part of our soul we must think this: that a god has given it as a spirit to each of us, that which we say dwells in the top part of the body, to lift us from the earth to its kindred in heaven, for we are not of earthly but of divine nature.²

¹Ibid., p. 143. ²Plato, Timaeus, 90a.
The **Laws** have nothing new to add to Plato's conception of the nature of the soul; rather, they serve to repeat and sum up a good deal of what has been said already. In the first book the tripartite nature of the soul is illustrated in still another fashion. "The golden thread of the intellect, that which is called the common law in the state," must be preserved at all costs. The soul must be honored above all other possessions; it is second only to the gods.

In the tenth book Plato introduces a new and startling development. After establishing that the soul is prior to the body and the cause of all motion, the Athenian continues:

And after that we must surely agree that the soul is the cause of things good and bad, beautiful and ugly, just and unjust, and of all the opposites, if indeed, we are to make it the cause of all things.

And as soul resides in and controls everything that has movement it must necessarily control the heavens also?

Is there one soul, or are there more than one? More.

I will answer for you. Not less than two at any rate: one that does good and one that does evil.

Very well. Now soul drives all things in heaven, on the earth and on the sea by its own motions which are called will, investigation, care, deliberation, belief true and false. . . . If it has acquired wisdom, god unto gods, it guides all things to right and happiness; but if it associates with ignorance it works the opposite in all things.¹

This apparent dualism is a logical consequence of the view that the soul is the origin of all motion and all life, both

¹Plato, *Laws*, 896d.
good and bad. But as for the possibility of two warring factions in the heavens, this notion is soon disposed of because the regularity of the heavenly bodies' motion is a sufficient proof that the cosmos is ruled by one or more good souls gifted with wisdom.\(^1\) Also the various souls responsible for the motions of the sun, moon, and stars have divine wisdom and are rightly called gods.\(^2\) It will be seen later that the heavenly bodies contain divinities which are themselves good. The bad souls can only be the souls of ignorant men. It is the absence of knowledge that makes some souls misdirect their power. This can be cured by education and teaching. Thus, it is seen that Plato remained consistent in his view that the nature of divinity is good. An evil soul in man is caused by his own actions, not by the evil inherent in his soul.

3. The Implications of the Immortality of the Soul

From first to last Plato considers the soul of man to be his highest and noblest part. Though there is no fundamental contradiction, there is considerable development in Plato's conception of the soul. This development issues in the divine nature of the soul, so it would be best to review Plato's doctrine to fully appreciate the position of the soul in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*.

\(^1\)Ibid., 897b-8c. \(^2\)Ibid., 899b.
i. The Divine Nature of the Soul

In the Meno it was found that the knowledge of the Ideas is inherent in the soul. The soul must have knowledge before its birth in the body; thus it exists prior to the body. It is by means of the soul that Plato is able to bridge the gap between the Forms and the world of particulars. The soul exists in the body and yet is able to apprehend the eternal Ideas. In the Phaedo the soul is essentially akin to the Ideas; the relationship is so close that the soul is more of the nature of the intellect than of the passions or other aspects of the body. The Phaedrus introduces the notion that the soul is not so much linked with the Ideas as with the gods. The soul here is also associated with the origin of all movement. The tripartite nature of the soul is given expression in the Republic, and the unity of the soul which was departmentalized in the Phaedo is re-established. The relationship of the human soul and the world-soul is introduced in the Timaeus, and the immortality of the rational part of the soul is declared. The Laws state that the soul is the originator of all life and akin to the gods. For Plato it is the soul that fuses the intelligible with the physical. This the soul is able to do because it belongs to both the physical and the intelligible, being made of the two. The soul alone can apprehend the universals; it alone can initiate the harmonious
motions in the universe and in man which gives them their life. The Ideas do not depend on the soul for their existence as Plato demonstrated in the *Phaedo*, but without the soul these Ideas can not be apprehended nor realized to any extent at all. On the other hand, without the soul the physical world could not even exist.¹

It was pointed out in the discussion of the *Phaedo* that in early Greek religion an immortal soul signified its divinity. In general, the essential attributes of the divine is its immortality—exemption from old age, decay, and death. Whatever is immortal is divine; whatever is divine, immortal.² Plato never gives a direct proof of the divine nature of the soul. It appears that he assumes that if he can demonstrate the immortality of the soul, he has in fact proved its divinity, so close where the two terms in Greek thought. Man's soul was that part of him that was of the nature of the divine—that part which would render intelligible to man the realm of the Ideas. In the macrocosm the soul gave being and unity to the physical universe. Later, in his philosophy, Plato was to state that the soul is the divinest part of man. The soul is the second in honor, the first being God.³ Thus it can be seen that the proofs of the immortality of the soul also

signify its divinity, but in no wise identify it with the Divinity. It is Plato's contention that the divine soul is that part of man which can communicate with the gods and even be akin to the nature of the gods.¹ But this point will be discussed further.

ii. Immortality as Key to Plato's Theology

In conclusion to Chapter V it might be well to make a transition from the human realm to the supernatural realm as it was exhibited in Plato's philosophy of the soul. The philosophy of the soul suggests that the soul has divine potentiality, set apart from the sway of passions, unchanged amid all that changes—it is our truer self.² Plato was fighting against the contentions of the Eleatics and the later Atomists that knowledge was impossible, and his doctrine of Ideas was his answer to their scepticism. Plato then was faced with the problem of having two realms of being, the intelligible and the physical, with no means of bringing them together. His conception of the human soul allowed for the existence of an unchanging, rational part of man's being which would mediate between these two worlds. This soul, being in motion, was also claimed to be immortal. In Plato's thought immortal meant divine, so the soul also was divine and akin to the divine gods. Therefore the knowledge of the intelligible

¹Solmsen, op. cit., p. 94. ²More, op. cit., p. 109.
world which the soul permits man to possess allows for the possibility of man having knowledge of the existence of the gods. In order to postulate the existence of the gods or God, Plato had first to show how man could apprehend these deities. The strongest evidence Plato gives for this apprehension is the soul's own consciousness of itself. This fact, coupled with the arguments for the duration of the soul as the ultimate source of motion, Plato would incorporate into the attributes of a Being who could be understood as the repository of the Forms, of consciousness, divine, and as the cause of motion in the soul. This Being was to be the Demiurge of the Timaeus and the God of the Laws.

It is now time to turn to an examination of Plato's conception of God. It has been necessary to consider first the antecedent religious environment and gain some insight as to the prevailing theories at that time. Next it was important to develop the doctrine of Ideas to realize the basis of Plato's essentialism and the nature of his objective reality. However, Plato found that the gulf between the intelligible world of Ideas and the physical world was too great to admit of knowledge of one by the other. Therefore, the philosophy of the soul was developed to show how Plato bridged the gap between the universal realities and their

1Plato, Laws, 726.
particular or material manifestations. The soul was found to bear the properties of divinities insofar as it was immortal. The divine aspect of man's nature was therefore capable of apprehending the existence of supernatural deities by virtue of its immortality and divinity. This background was highly essential for a number of reasons. Plato was somewhat of a pioneer in Greek religion and consequently had to divest himself of the older forms of religious thought as well as make his way slowly to his own mature conception of God. His concept of God was not the direct outgrowth of the above doctrines; rather, it developed concomitantly with these other aspects of his philosophy. But in order to appreciate the development of his thought in its totality, not just his isolated theology, these prior parts of his system have been introduced. It must be continually kept in mind that Plato was attempting to integrate all parts of his thought as he grew in understanding. Therefore, if the whole sweep of his philosophy is recalled as his theology is developed, then, the emergence of a god is not merely an isolated fact, but a natural outgrowth of the man's entire thought. Also, one must realize that Plato never put as much emphasis on his theology as did later scholars, so that any attempted development must include prior as well as accompanying concepts as they are employed by him to bring to actuality his mature conception of a God.
CHAPTER VI

PLATO'S CONCEPTION OF GOD

The Greek word *theos* is in no way identical with the English word *God*. Invariably, the Christian concept of God connotes a mysterious Being whose nature and existence is already supposed. When the word *God* is used, it is generally used in a qualitative sense i.e., something is being said about God. In Greek religion however, God is generally a predicative notion. There is no suggestion that he has any properties other than a descriptive predication for other subjects. Thus if God is love or beauty, there is no assumption made as to God's divinity; rather, something is being said about the nature of love or beauty. To say that love is a god is to say that there is in its nature something more than human, something not subject to death.¹ Usually the Greeks referred to their gods as the deathless ones. Any power in the world which was not caused by human endeavor or born with humans, and which continued to live after the death of the mortal body, was called a god. It was asserted in Chapter V that the Greek words *divine*, *deathless*, and *indestructible* were synonymous. The soul, being deathless and indestructible, was therefore divine as well. Therefore the noun *theos* and the adjective *theios* both refer to that which is more lasting than man.

¹Grube, *op. cit.*, p. 150
Much confusion about the nature of Plato's God can be alleviated if the proper distinction between the static and the dynamic aspects of the divine be kept in mind. The Christian notion of God is a synthesis of these two aspects, but Plato keeps them separated, and upon the basis of this separation rest two wholly distinct ideas of Plato's philosophy. The divine can be looked upon as being Ultimate Reality, the highest form of being, the eternally absolute. It can also be considered the Creator, the first cause, the active force of all movement and life. The first or static conception of the divine comprises Plato's Forms or Ideas. This is the metaphysical part of his philosophy. Plato never calls these metaphysical entities gods in the religious sense. The Ideas are pure essences, in no way connected with the religious divinities which partake of human personality, emotion, memory, mind, and purpose. The second aspect of the divine is what Plato calls the gods or God. These beings are the anthropomorphic deities of Homer and the tragedians as well as the personal beings of Plato in whom man can find help and guidance in living the good life. It is the latter feature of the divine that will be considered in this thesis as Plato's religious conception of God. The being of God will first be developed as it took its roots in the early Socratic dialogues and as it found its more complete statement in the myths of the later dialogues. The concept of God as creator will then be taken up as it is formulated in the Timaeus. Finally Plato's synthesis of his religious philosophy in Book
Ten of the Laws will be examined as his final statement on the relation of his God to early Greek religion, the Ideas, and the soul.

1. The Being of God

1. Euthyphro

The initial dichotomy of the static and the dynamic parts of the divine is given formulation in the Euthyphro. Socrates asks the priest Euthyphro whether the gods love what is right because it is right, or is it right because the gods love it.¹ Plato is adamant in his belief that the gods love what is right; whatever the gods may be, they must by their nature love what is right because it is right. The gods must conform to the nature of Ultimate Reality as fixed by the Forms which exist independently of themselves. The absolute Ideas are above the gods and the gods must adhere to them. In early Greek religion the gods were never claimed to have created the world; they were not creators, but created beings. Plato's early conception of the gods conformed to the eternal Form and scale of values. They did not create them, and they cannot alter them. Thus the gods are subject to the supreme standard of right, to which by their nature they conform. Plato does not feel obligated to establish the existence of the gods in this dialogue. It is almost as if he never doubted their being. Any formal proof for the existence of the gods must be indirectly demonstrated through other divinities, i.e. the soul.

¹Plato, Euthyphro, 10a.
11. Republic

The existence of the gods in the Phaedo is once again taken as given. Man is placed upon earth by the gods and must not disobey them; the gods care for him and his possessions, and the good man will join the gods after his death. The gods do not appear at the same time as the discussion of the Forms and they have no part in the discussion of immortality. Thus far in the dialogues there is no argument or analysis in favor of the gods; all that is undertaken is the general statement that the gods refer to divine powers and that they are subject to the Ultimate Reality of the Ideas. When the Ideas are fully developed, Plato gives the distinct impression that they and the gods are never on the stage at the same time. Both are divine as was stated earlier; the gods represent in mythical and religious form the eternal world that the Forms describe in metaphysical language. 2

In the Republic the gods seem to be on an equal footing with the Ideas. However, as was noticed in Chapter IV, the Idea of the Good must not be identified with God. Up until the tenth book the gods enter the discussion only twice, both in connection with art and the artist. In Book Two, Plato makes his case for a truthful God which was put forward in the chapter

1Plato, Phaedo, 62a, 63b. 2Grube, op. cit., p.158.
on the relation of the Ideas and God.\textsuperscript{1} The second mention of the gods is in the tenth book when Plato talks about the painter being twice removed from reality. He says that the artist copies an actual bed which a carpenter has fashioned from a concept of bedness in his mind, and this Idea is the work of God.\textsuperscript{2} In this passage, Plato makes the Forms subject to the will of God. But this idea is so foreign to other statements about the relation of the Ideas and God that it must be taken as merely pointing up the vast difference between the Form of bed and the image of bed that the artist finally puts on canvas. The gods still represent the supersensual world, and when the gods come on the scene, the Ideas depart.

The Myth of Er does not introduce any advancement in Plato's theology, as the Olympian fates Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos, with the goddess Necessity are the divinities who are responsible for judging man as he passes from this earthly existence to his reward after death. The importance of this myth is the emphasis placed on man's free choice, and that the responsibility of his life after death lies with the individual: "The fault lies with the chooser, God is not responsible."\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{1}Supra., p.44 \textsuperscript{2}Plato, Republic, p. 597 \textsuperscript{3}Ibid., 617e.
Indeed, the point that God is not responsible for evil, emphasized here and in Book Three is the main contribution of Plato's God. The moral qualities which are attributed to God in the Republic are goodness, wisdom, truth, and immutability. These same characteristics are again set forth in the Theaetetus.

Evil has no place in the divine world, but this region of our mortal nature must of necessity be haunted by it. That is why we should make all haste to escape from this world to the other. The way of escape lies in becoming as like God as possible; and that means becoming righteous and holy with the help of wisdom. But it is not a very easy matter to persuade men that the right motive for eschewing wickedness and following after goodness is not, as the world supposes, the hope of acquiring a good reputation instead of a bad... In God there is no sort or kind of unrighteousness. He is perfectly righteous; and there is nothing more like him than a man who becomes as righteous as he can.  

iii. Phaedrus

The same general approach as was carried out in the Republic is followed in the Symposium and Phaedrus. But whereas in the Republic the approach is much more intellectual, the Symposium and Phaedrus have an emotional strain running through them. Eros in the Symposium is the spirit that bridges the gap between the Ideas and those who apprehend them. In the Phaedrus Eros is no longer just a spirit, but now takes on the qualities of a God or a divine spirit. But the gods appear along with the Ideas, and they only

1 Plato, Theaetetus, 176a.  
2 Plato, Phaedrus, 242e.
achieve their divinity because of their relation to the Ideas.¹

In the preceding chapter, it was seen that Plato had suggested in the Phaedrus that it was the immortal soul that bridged the gap between the eternal realities and the physical world. It has also been pointed out in the introduction to the present chapter that the gods also are divine and capable of apprehending the Forms. The gods, which are perfect and immortal, are far superior to the mortality and imperfection of human beings. They are thus able to have a clear and constant view of the Forms whereas the finitude of man prevents him from anything more than an occasional glimpse of the Forms. It is not until the Laws that Plato links the best in man, his soul, to the gods. At this point, he merely points out that it is the gods who best form the bridge between man and reality.

It is now time to reconcile the dichotomy that was introduced in the Euthyphro. Thus far Plato has separated the notion of a static Reality and a dynamic Reality. The metaphysical Ideas have taken precedence over the religious concept of God, but this division and hierarchy is to disappear in the concept of the creator in the Timaeus.

¹Ibid., 249c.
2. God as Finite Creator

Thus far in the discussion of Plato's conception of God there has been no mention or direct reference to the relation of God to the world. It was seen in the *Euthyphro* that the gods are dependent upon the Ideas: religious element in the early dialogues is subject to the metaphysical. In the *Republic* the gods and the Ideas never appear at the same time, but Plato is beginning to give equal significance to his gods. In the *Phaedo, Republic, Phaedrus, and the Theatetus* the gods are made synonymous with the divine and therefore akin to the soul. Finally, throughout Plato's discussion of the gods it is evident that the gods are good and not responsible for evil. For a more complete statement of this development Plato constructs a myth of the creation of the world, offering a conclusive picture of his philosophy as it relates to the physical world.

1. The Creation Myth

In the *Timaeus* Plato is interested in determining how the cosmos came into being. The dialogue is divided into two main sections. In the first section, Plato considers creation as a divine effect and as fulfilling a divine purpose.\(^1\) In the second part he inverts his point of view and creation is now seen as a divine product. Creation is conditioned by

\(^1\)Plato, *Timaeus*, 27d-47e.
the material out of which it is framed and under objective laws of symbols and geometrical forms. Each section is further divided; the first subdivision of each section deals with the activity of God, the Demiurge, while the section subdivision tells what is done by the lesser gods under the command of the Demiurge.

In early Greek religion, creation was not considered as it is now in the Christian religion. Creation is not an evocation of something out of nothing by a mere word of fiat. To Plato the thought of a creator and a thing created implied necessarily the presence of a substance out of which the object is created. Coupled with the creator and his "pattern" is needed a third order of existence, to which he gives a variety of names: space, the Receptacle, the invisible and shapeless kind, necessity. Plato describes the Ideas or patterns and the phenomena or Receptacle as the objective terms of knowledge and opinion (Ideas) contrasted with a faculty of the soul that is but a sort of infrarational intuition (Receptacle).

Briefly, the creation of the cosmos takes place when God, or the Demiurge, with the eternal Ideas before him, "persuades" the chaotic, recalcitrant Receptacle into proper form.

1Ibid., 47e-end. 2More, op. cit., p. 203. 3Plato, Timaeus, 48e-52c. 4Ibid., 27c-29.
After forming an ordered system, the Demiurge then places nous or mind in us. As mind can only exist in a soul, the sensible world became "by the providence of God, a living being with soul and mind." Since the Demiurge made the universe as a perfect replica of the model he had before him, there must be only one universe and this must be as perfect as the model from which it was fashioned. However, the model is a fixed Form which the Demiurge had to "persuade" unto the recalcitrant forces of the Receptacle. The Receptacle is the chaos which "is agitated everywhere by irregular disturbances, random vibratory movements, and exhibiting in various regions mere rude incipient traces of the definite structure we know as characteristic of the various forms of the body." Thus three principles are involved in the creation of the cosmos: the Demiurge, the Forms, and the Receptacle.

It was seen in Plato's earlier thought that the Ideas and the gods were frequently taken as being synonymous. Therefore the relation between the Demiurge and the Ideas in the Timaeus will be discussed to show the transition in his thinking. Plato is careful not to confuse God, who as a personal creator is good and free from envy, with the pattern of Goodness which guided his hand in the work of creation. There is very definitely two kinds of reality that combine to

\[1\text{Ibid., 27c-29.} \quad 2\text{Ibid., 44ff.}\]
impose form on the Receptacle.

Everything that comes to be is necessarily due to some cause. Nothing can come to be without a cause. When the maker of anything has in view a model that is unchangeable and thus fashions the form and function of it, then the result must necessarily be well achieved. But when the model is something that becomes, the result is not beautiful.¹

The maker and the Ideas are independent of one another. The maker has the pattern (the Ideas) before him at the time of creation. Thus there are two realities: the one the object of knowledge, the other the objects of perception and belief.² The Ideas contain within themselves the meanings, the Logos, of all the things and creatures of the earth as a pattern which the Demiurge sees and understands and then tries to realize in the material universe. These patterns cannot live, move, or change, but they are eternally are-- independent of the physical world and of God.

Following the creation of the physical cosmos, God then created the World-Soul and the lesser gods or souls. He then consigned the creation of man to these lesser gods. However, he himself instilled the divine part or soul into man after he had been given a corporeal body.³ God then proceeded to make the various lesser animals, the creation of which fell into four classes. These were the gods who lived in the sky, winged creatures who inhabited the air, aquatic creatures, and land-animals.⁴

¹Ibid., 28a. ²Grube, op. cit., p. 163.
³Plato, Timaeus, 69b. ⁴Ibid., 39e.
The creation of the astronomical bodies was conceived according to the astronomical knowledge of the time. The World-Soul spread throughout the whole cosmos a series of circles which correspond to the orbits of the sun, moon, and the planets. Time is conceived as "the moving image of eternity."\(^1\) made possible by the revolutions of the heavenly bodies and responsible for the existence of the days, nights, months, and years. The less important inhabitants of the heavens are gods, and even the stars are thought of as divine creatures.

Plato goes into an elaborate description of the creation of the geometrical and mathematical elements that compose the structure of the physical world. Following this presentation he delves into human anatomy, physiology, psychology and pathology.\(^2\) As this part of the *Timaeus* is not requisite to the study, it will be passed over with a mere acknowledgement.

This brief summary of the creation lacks finality because there has been little mention of the Demiurge or Artificer of the universe. Because this Demiurge is Plato's first complete notion of the Deity, special attention must be given to it.

\section*{ii. The Demiurge}

"The father and maker of all this universe is past finding out; and even if we found him, to tell of him to all men would

\(^1\)Ibid., 35b. \(^2\)Ibid., 53c-56c, 69a-87b.
be impossible."  

So begins Plato's apologetic for a belief in God. Plato is thus warning his readers, as he has hinted throughout his dialogues, that when it comes to seeking the nature and existence of super-natural beings, he must trust to his intuition and relate this knowledge in myths. The myth of the Timaeus attempts to demonstrate that the phenomenal world cannot exist without realities of a different order on which it is dependent. The creator in this case is a symbol of the source and origin of all life. It is not until the Laws that Plato attempts to give a dialectical proof of the existence of God. But in order to gain some understanding as to what Plato means by God in relation to his creation, this section will be devoted to the attributes and characteristics of the artificer of the universe.

Timaeus says that the creator made the cosmos because he was good, and the good can never have any jealousy of anything. God desired that all things should be good and nothing be bad, so far as this goal is attainable. Reflecting on the nature of things, God decided that an intelligent being was far superior to an unintelligent creature, and that intelligence could not be present in anything that was devoid of soul. Therefore he put intelligence in soul and soul in the body. The world thereby became a living body endowed with soul and intelligence by the providence of God. This concept of Providence

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1 Ibid., 28c.  
2 Cf. Socrates' mania in Apology, "inspiration" in Ion, and "genius" in the Symposium.  

3 Ibid., 28e.  
4 Ibid., 30d.
is directed against the followers of Democritus and Protagoras who believed that the gods were set apart from mankind and the world, and all immediate operations of the world were the effects of chance or impersonal law.¹ God is good—perfectly simple and true in thought and deed; all that is good proceeds from him through his desire to have his nature manifested in the world. Upon the creation of the gods, the children of the gods, and all his works, the Demiurge addresses them as their artificer and father.² He appears to be conceived of as a personal agent—endowed with moral perfection to the end that his creation might participate in his goodness and love.

The Demiurge is referred to as mind and consequently as soul. There is a legitimate question as to whether he can really be termed a creator. The Demiurge is limited by the Receptacle and has to make use of the Forms which are presumebly independent of him. He is more than the artisan who develops his creation out of existing material. The function of this artificer is not so much to impart life and movement to the universe as to make it, in its totality, as excellent an order of Becoming as possible. Yet it is the essence of his work to impart to

¹More, op. cit., p.158. ²Plato, Timaeus, 41b.
this realm of Becoming qualities characteristic of the higher and eternal realm. The first creature fashioned by the Demi-urge is a being Plato calls the World-Soul. This soul then becomes his agent in the creation of other beings. In the discussion on the nature of the soul in Chapter V it was learned that the soul was responsible for motion and was the active principle of movement. Here in the Timaeus this concept is carefully followed through. In order to account for the motion and movements of the cosmos Plato must posit a soul. Thus it is that the Demiurge creates this World-Soul first in time that the material components and individual parts of the universe might find their existence. In the realm of value perfect movement is obviously the first. To consider the same principle responsible for the harmonious and most beautiful movements and for the origin of movement, change, and life generally is to render that principle divine in Plato's language. Logically considered, that which originates motion in a world where all things are visibly moving is antecedent to that which is moved.

Thus soul draws and leads all things in heaven and on earth and in the sea by its own motions, which we call willing, viewing, attending, considering, opining rightly or wrongly, itself rejoicing or grieving, courageous or fearful, hating or loving. It will follow further that the revolution of the heavens, which displays such manifest beauty and reg-

\[1\text{Solmsen, op. cit., p.103.}\]

\[2\text{Ibid., p. 89.}\]
ularity must be the work of a headful
and order-loving soul. The sun, moon,
and stars have their course not by
chance but by the direction of guid-
ing powers which are consciously good,
and over all the universe presides
that great spirit which is none other
than God.¹

It is at once evident that this interpretation of the soul's
function and nature is a direct outgrowth and final statement
of the concept of soul as presented in the Phaedo, Republic,
and Phaedrus.

It can also be noticed that the World-Soul has taken
over many functions that were previously filled by the Ideas.
The World-Soul now imparts to the world of flux, regularity,
harmony and reason. Now the Soul is responsible for the
being or particular things. The soul is even described as
"the cause of the good."² It has been mistakenly said that
the World-Soul is identical with the Demiurge.³ However, a
careful reading indicates that the Demiurge created the
World-Soul according to very specific requirements.⁴ Very
simply, the World-Soul contained three constituents: a Being,
which is intermediate between that which is always "self-same"
and that which "becomes and is divisible" in bodies, a simili-
early "intermediate" kind of Sameness, and Otherness. The

¹More, op. cit., p. 130. ²Solmsen, op. cit., p.172.
³Grube, op. cit., holds this view, cf. p.170.
⁴Plato, Timaeus, 35b-37c.
mixture of these three ingredients is divided into two circles, one called the Same and the other called the Other. These two circles are further subdivided and made to revolve in opposite directions. The circle of the Same and the Other, being circles in the soul, have an epistemological as well as astronomical significance. Their uniform revolutions symbolize on the one hand science of the eternal and unchanging, and on the other hand true conviction about the temporal. Later Plato refers to the cup in which the Demiurge had previously mingled the soul of the universe. Therefore God is not to be identified with the World-Soul. Nothing in Plato's philosophy would suggest this. The only connection between the Demiurge and the World-Soul is that they both partake of the attributes of the soul. The Demiurge contains all the characteristics of the soul that have already been mentioned. He is morally affected, abiding in his own character, going about his work with intelligence, and possessing reason as a soul in the form of pure reason—creating, governing, and guiding. These same attributes are also accorded the World-Soul and the minor gods, but with less distinction. So while the World-Soul is not God, it does bear similar characteristics because it helps the

2 Plato, Timaeus, 41d.
3 More, op. cit., p. 224.
Demiurge in his acts of creation and performs many of the functions the divine Demiurge takes on.

For the first time in the dialogues Plato makes a distinction between the gods and God. God as the Demiurge created all the lesser gods. They are created creators. God is the creator who is uncreated. He is timeless as he created time when he created the world. The gods however, are temporal. God is eternal; the gods are everlasting. The gods were created out of the mixture of the indivisible with the divisible; they are impure and partake of the refractory element which is the Receptacle. God on the other hand is pure and simple. However, if God partakes of the nature of soul and yet is the creator of all soul, a difficult problem arises. If God created soul, how can he partake of its nature? To avoid absurdities the details of the myth of the *Timaeus* ought not to be taken too literally. Soul is an attribute of the Demiurge, the World-Soul, and the lesser gods. The divine principle exists in all the gods, but this involves no problem for Plato. According to his Greek religious background, Plato expressed the divine principle as both a unity and a plurality. It is only later thinkers who try to impose a monotheism on his writing. The plurality of the gods does not abolish the unity of God. It only renders it intelligible, since a bare One is nothing. The plurality is organized according to the principle

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of degrees of perfection and power, such that the totality of subordinate gods executes the commands of the Supreme God.¹ The distinction between God and the gods is occasionally forgotten, and in the second section of the *Timaeus* the term God and gods are employed almost indiscriminately where, by virtue of the earlier distinctions, the gods ought properly to be used. P.E. More says that the distinction between God and gods is rather artificial and has no great significance. He says that the chief reason for making it is to separate the divine goodness of God from the irregularities which belong to the individual members of the system. God is not responsible for the evils that exist, only the good. Yet these lesser gods merely follow out the commands of their Father, and their subordination to him is no more than a convenient fiction for the fact that we cannot comprehend the relation between a perfect creator and an imperfect creation.²

The Demiurge is a finite God. He is limited by the Ideas, the Receptacle, and by his own creatures. Both the Receptacle and the Ideal pattern are uncreated and independent of the will of the Demiurge. Thus the power of God is limited. God is responsible for the world only up to a point; he is limited by the potentialities of the Receptacle. Plato, recognizing the difficulty in

positing omnipotence and omnibenevolence in the same Divinity, limits the power of God in order to preserve his goodness.\(^1\) God is the author only of the good in the world, not of the evil. Therefore evil is a fact even for God to contend with.\(^2\) God does not constitute the totality of things. He is only one factor in creation and is thereby limited in his power.

Plato has thus developed in mythical form his first concrete conception of God. There are many questions yet to be answered, but the theology of the *Laws* will speak to these more theological problems in systematic fashion. The *Timaeus* has spoken to the existence of a finite creator who is complemented in his creation by the models of perfection, i.e. the Ideas, and the Given of matter upon which he imposes this perfection to create the world. This Demiurge is Plato's God in that he is beyond time, contingency, and divisibility. In order to understand this God's relation to man and the cooperation between God and man, it is necessary to turn to Plato's final word on religion, philosophy, and theology, the *Laws*.

\(^1\)Demos, *op. cit.*, pp. 106, 120.

\(^2\)Plato, *Republic*, 380c, *Timaeus*, 482, and later *Laws*, 906a, states that God is not the cause of all things. God, being good, is responsible for all that is good, but there is more evil than good in the world. It is this evil for which God is not responsible, which he resists, and which he has to make the best of—that imposes limitation to the power of a good God.
3. The Nature of God

Book Ten of the *Laws* introduces us to the natural theology of Plato. He is convinced that there are certain truths about God which can be strictly demonstrated, and that the denial of these leads to bad living.\(^1\) In this book is found for the first time a dialectical demonstration of the existence of the gods, their providence, and their justice. Each of the denials of the above Plato regards as pernicious, and he refutes them in turn, paying special attention to the first, the existence of the gods. The *Laws* is regarded as Plato's *magnus opus*, a treatise written in his old age containing his most matured and best-settled opinions on many of the great themes and subjects discussed in his other dialogues. Therefore the theology of the *Laws* will be regarded as normative for his final views on the nature and existence of God.

1. The Existence of God

Book Ten opens with the statement by the Athenian that no one who believes in the existence of the gods ever does an impious deed or utters a lawless word. If he does so, he does not believe in the gods; or secondly, he believes that they exist but have no care for mankind; or thirdly, that they are easy to be entreated and turned away by sacrifice and prayer.\(^2\) Cleinias then offers two beliefs for the existence of the gods which Plato himself gives in his earlier dialogues. First, is the argument from design. Plato points to the visible order of the heavens, the stars, and the

\(^{1}\) Plato, *Laws*, 885b.  
\(^{2}\) Idem.
universe as an eloquent witness to the existence of a creator.\textsuperscript{1} In the Republic he also finds a spiritual reality by turning his attention upward to the ordered patterns in the circle of the sky.\textsuperscript{2} The second common belief held by men is the argument from the universality of belief. Cleinias says that all men, Greek and barbarian alike, believe in the existence of the gods.\textsuperscript{3} Both of these arguments are discounted by the Athenian on the grounds that one, there are contrary views to both of the above, and two, this type of religious belief is merely convention— that which is regulated by man himself, not by what exists in nature itself.\textsuperscript{4} Following this preamble, the Athenian gives his own proof for the existence of the gods, their providence and their justice.

The first heresy that he speaks to is atheism, the belief that there are no gods at all. This belief he holds to be the least offensive of all. Atheism is treated by Plato as identical with the doctrine that the world and its contents, souls included, are the product of unintelligent motions of corporeal elements.\textsuperscript{5} His main argument rests on the previously established theory that the soul is

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Ibid.}, 886a. \textsuperscript{2}\textit{Plato, Republic}, 529c.
\textsuperscript{3}\textit{Plato, Laws}, 887c, and \textit{Gorgias}, 474a.
\textsuperscript{4}\textit{Plato, Laws}, 889-90.
\textsuperscript{5}\textit{Taylor, op. cit.}, p. 490.
the only thing that can initiate its own movement, and that all motion ultimately comes from it. If this be granted, than all corporeal movements are causally dependent upon the "motions" of soul, and the world is therefore the work of a soul or souls. Further, these souls are good, and there is one "perfectly good soul" at their head. Plato still adheres to the dictum in the Republic that the gods are not responsible for everything, but only for what is good. The orderly motions of the heavens show that they are governed by a wise and rational soul, the perfectly good soul. But there exists another soul or souls having the contrary effect, and these souls are responsible for the evil in the world. Thus, only the good soul is responsible for the orderly movements of the heavens. The unbeliever must either disprove the premise that the soul is the origin of all motion or else accept the conclusion that Plato draws from it, that the gods exist.

The argument turns on an analysis of the word motion. All motion belongs to one of two classes, either communicative motion, "the movement which can only move other things," and spontaneous motion, "the movement that can move itself." All motion is derived from spontaneous motion, and thus it is said to be "alive"—there is "soul" in it. Soul is the name

1 See Phaedrus, 245c-46e. 2 Plato, Laws, 897-8. 3 Plato, Republic, 379e 4 Plato, Laws, 893b-94e. 5 Ibid., 894b.
Plato gives to the motion that moves itself. All the movements of the soul, i.e. "tempers and wishes, and calculations, true beliefs, interests and memories," are the source and cause of all physical movement, since no physical movement is spontaneous. Thus far the argument is an elaboration of that which was given briefly in the Phaedrus for the immortality of the soul.

God or the gods is quite definitely declared to be a soul which means for Plato that the universe is a result of divine purposive activity. This is what is meant by the personality of God. As was suggested in the Republic and reiterated in the Timaeus, God is not a Form. Plato's God contemplates the Forms and reproduces them in the order of the sensible world. The answer to the old question of the Phaedo, "what is the cause of the presence of a form to a sensible thing?" is that God is the cause. The argument seems to disregard the question which has been taken up earlier, as to whether there is one God or many. However, Plato speaks of the best soul and this would indicate that he considers one soul to be supreme. There is not much doubt that this best soul is responsible for the one movement which, from the point of view of Plato's astronomy, presents no irregularity or anomaly at all. In Plato's astronomy soul is that which is responsible for the harmony, regularity, and identity with themselves of the motions of the universe. This best soul or perfectly

1Ibid., 896d.  
2Taylor, op. cit., p. 492.
good soul is God. As to how this soul is related to that which it moves, Plato is not clear, but he does offer a number of different views. With this passage Plato has developed his Theism, a doctrine professing to be capable of scientific demonstration. Plato is thus the creator of "philosophical Theism."\(^1\) Given this proof for the existence of God, the refutation of the other two heresies becomes a simple matter.

ii. The Providence of God

Plato next attempts to show that the power who cares for the universe disposes all things with the view of preserving its excellence.\(^2\) Plato has already pointed out that the evil in the world cannot be imputed to God. If it be admitted that God is possessed of every virtue, indolence and indifference cannot be a part of his nature. Neither can it be that there is alack in his will to do good. It cannot be supposed that he will neglect anything, great or small. This would be to say that the "best soul" is cowardly or "work-shy." Next is shown the importance of small things as parts of the whole, absolutely essential to its totality. Without small things, the great could not exist. Herein is the doctrine of the special Providence of God, one who is mindful of the small as well as the great. The picture is elaborated and made relevant to the human situation.\(^3\) The world, itself

\(^1\) Plato, *Laws*, 899a., suggests that the soul governs the universe from within the heavenly bodies like the soul of man causes all his motions; or having a body of fire or some form of air, it impels the heavens from without; or thirdly, being naked of body itself, the soul acts as a guide to the heavens.

\(^2\) Ibid, p. 493.

\(^3\) Plato, *Laws*, 903b.

\(^4\) Ibid, 903b.
a compound of body and soul, is everlasting; it acts as "a conserver of value" and our lives are governed according to our own way of life, i.e. virtue rises and wickedness descends. Every individual soul is responsible for its own providence.¹ This is the justice of God from which no man can escape in life or death.²

iii. The Justice of God

It follows from the above argument that God cannot be tempted from the path of justice by prayer and sacrificial offerings. Plato contrasts the justice of God with doctors, farmers and cattle-herds. Having agreed that there is an eternal cosmic struggle between good and bad, it was seen that the gods are the allies of men and their property. Man is destroyed by injustice, excess and folly; and saved by justice, moderation and knowledge, all of which later dwell in the living power of the gods. Some of the souls of the world are of evil character and bestial. Coming in contact with other souls they persuade them by flattery and by charm that they might give way to excess upon earth without suffering for it. This error of excess is in the body called disease, in the cycle of the seasons it is pestilence, and in cities and governments it is called injustice.³

If the gods were to wink at the conduct of human beings or be bought off with prayers and sacrifices, are they not behaving like the dogs who accept portions of meat from the wolves in order to

¹Ibid., 904e.  
²Ibid., 905d.  
³Ibid., 905e.
share the plunder of a delivered flock? But can the gods be thus considered; have not the gods been found to be like generals, physicians, or husband-men who are men's most exalted guardians? If so, then the gods, who are the chiefest of all the guardians, must guard our higher interests. And shall it be said that those who guard our noblest interests, and are the best guardians, are inferior in virtue to loyal dogs who would not be bribed from their duty, and to men even of moderate excellence who would never betray justice for the sake of gifts which men offer them?¹

The answer is obvious that if the best part of mankind cannot be propitiated, then it is absurd that the gods would ever accept bribes or be unjust. Clearly the gods cannot be worse than honest men. The Athenian concludes that the three assertions—that the gods exist, that they take care of men, and that they can never be persuaded to injustice—are sufficiently demonstrated.

iv. Conclusion²

In surveying Plato's conception of God as a whole, it is found that he held a belief in an order and a purpose in the universe throughout his life, but his conception of his gods becomes more articulate as it developed from one period of his life to another. The keynote was struck in the Euthyphro where

¹Ibid., 906a-907d.

²The organization of iv. is taken from Grube, op. cit., pp. 176-8.
the absolute, unchanging reality of moral values was established. These values and other realities later become the Ideas, and as in this first dialogue, they remain prior to the gods and ultimate to the end.

The Ideas and the gods are used without distinction from the beginning up to and including the Republic. In these earlier passages the gods refer mainly to anything eternal, more than human and the sum-total of such things. The gods are religious realities while the Ideas are metaphysical values. It can be said that the gods are the mythical representations of the Ideas insofar as the two never appear together, and they both seem to describe in turn the whole of the supra-sensuous world.

It is in the Phaedrus that the static and the dynamic aspects of the divine are clearly differentiated, and the gods are now definitely restricted to the latter. The relationship between the two is initially established in the Phaedo where the intellect is held to be a function of the soul, human or divine. Thereby the gods become explicitly souls, and a definite kinship is established between them and mortals. Then it was seen that the soul apprehends the static Ideas. The soul is the originator of movement and life in that it is the only thing that can move itself and thereupon lead to movement in the world.

In the Timaeus Plato discusses his first more fully developed concept of God. The Demiurge, himself a soul, is responsible for the creation of all other creatures, both divine and physical.
Plato is faced with the problem of how a soul can create a soul, and this question is never satisfactorily answered. However, he provides a more systematic presentation of the God-concept in the Laws. Plato was more interested in giving an explanation of the universe than a definite theology of its creator, at least at this point. In the Timaeus it is seen that the notion of soul now has been expanded to include a World-Soul who is responsible for that which gives life and motion to the cosmos. This World-Soul is similar to the soul in man. Just as in man the intellectual faculty is that which guides the other parts of the soul as well as the body, so in the World-Soul, it is the self-moving and self-ordering principle that gives being and existence to created things. With this concept Plato has separated the Ideas, the soul, and God. In a sense the myth of creation is a logical development of Plato's theory of the Ideas. The Ideas are the static, immutable patterns which the Demiurge, Plato's finite God, persuades onto the Receptacle. The World-Soul, second in creation only to the Demiurge, is that soul which gives being to the cosmos. The Timaeus emphasized the relationship between the creator and his creation. The creator represents soul in its perfect state (intellect and the power to move), a force at work in the world through a multiplicity of souls, divine and human. Plato also speaks of this creator as a Father and Maker of the universe. However, it appears that this Father is hardly a Father in the Christian monotheistic sense. Plato definitely
states that God is only Father insofar as he is the cause and origin of things. Nowhere does he say that he loves his children. There is no overlapping in the concepts of the cosmology of the Timaeus--all that remains to complete Plato’s notion of God is a more definitive conception of God and his relation to man.

The argument for the existence of God in Book Ten of the Laws was already anticipated in the Phaedrus. It turns on the notion of soul being synonymous with divine and with God. Only the motion that moves itself is able to account for the motions of all other things. From this principle of causality, taken together with the assumption that there cannot be an infinite regress in the causal series, comes the conclusion that there must be an original cause or causes of all movements that is or are self-moving--a soul or souls. From the regularity of the cosmic motions and systematic interconnection between them, it follows in Plato's thought that the ultimate "prime mover" is the perfectly good soul. Plato found that both good and bad souls exist, but in the universe all the regular and orderly motions belong to the class of good motions. Hence they must belong to good souls. If then, God can be defined as a perfectly good soul, it can be postulated that since the great motions of the universe are all perfectly orderly, they must be caused by God. If God is good and God is a soul, it follows that everything in the world is governed by a wise and beneficent Providence,
and that God's dealings with men are perfect and inexorably just.

Plato is never fully monotheistic even if he does show a strong tendency in that direction now and again. He was still a product of the Greek polytheistic culture, and saw no disparity between a single God and a multiplicity of gods. For Plato the world must have a purpose, and as long as that purpose is one, Plato saw no ambiguity in the conception of the purpose being worked out in a plurality of divine souls. Plato's divinity remained gods and yet God at the same time, and so he continued to use the plural as well as the singular with an indifference characteristic of the day.

From beginning to end Plato assumed that the gods existed. He never felt any need to prove this; it was part of every Greek's thinking. The notion of God undergoes radical transformation as Plato departs from traditional religious beliefs and develops his own notion of God. The God of the *Timaeus* and *Laws* is a different God from that of the early Socratic dialogues. Therefore another proof is needed—a proof commensurate with the highly developed theology of the *Laws*. Thus only at the end of his writing does Plato feel obligated to give formal proof of a God he knew existed from the beginning of his reflective life. This God represents the product of Plato's deeply religious nature and his desire to express this spiritual awareness in conceptual, philosophical and systematic form.

There was never any antagonism between Plato's religion and his philosophy. The beliefs that he dialectically established were that there is an order and purpose in the universe, that divine forces are at work throughout the world, and that the universal purpose is inexorable.\(^1\) The other religious beliefs that he held and which he related in myths and other stories, are mostly the product of an infinitely perceptive mind that could conceive the workings of God or the gods in the world and in the lives of men. As he said in the *Timaeus*, we can never know the gods and even if we did, we cannot communicate them to man.\(^2\) This indicates that Plato did not want any of his approaches to the problem of the Deity to be in any way final or dogmatic. Whenever he began speaking of the divine or immortal realm of being, Plato wrote in myths. However, he nowhere tells us that he finds more force or truth in science than in the myths. In the *Timaeus*, he rather suggested that for him they are on a par.\(^3\) Plato used the language of science and philosophy when discussing the physical realm; when he entered the supernatural realm, he employed the language of myths. Therefore, Plato's conception of God is the result of two factors. When he discussed relationships among physical realities, Plato communicated to others through his dialogical, philosophical method. When he entered the supernatural realm, he resorted to

\(^1\)Grube, op. cit., p. 178.  
\(^2\)Plato, *Timaeus*, 28c.  
\(^3\)Solmsen, op. cit., p. 146.
the use of myths. However, in either method, Plato attempted to explain a moral and orderly universe in terms of his own personal experience which came to him much like the daemon of Socrates.
The following conclusions have been arrived at in this thesis:

1. Plato is much indebted to early Greek religion, and in much of his early writing he professes the religion and theology of Homer, the tragedians, and the Pre-Socratics.

2. Dissatisfied with the anthropomorphic forms of this religion and the solipsism of the Sophists, Plato suggested a realm of being that would answer the deficiencies of both.

3. The doctrine of Ideas was Plato's metaphysical hypothesis that provided for a supra-sensual world that would give being and existence to the physical world. (Euthyphro, Phaedo, Republic.)

4. The realm of Forms initially corresponded to Plato's concept of divinity,—a static, metaphysical Reality. (Phaedo, Republic.)

5. The notion of a religious God at this stage is hardly more than the traditional Greek concept of the gods. Plato uses the term gods and God almost indiscriminately; more often than not when he refers to the gods he is speaking of the anthropomorphic deities of Homer, et al.

6. Plato's notion of the soul arose out of need for a permanent element in man's being which was of the nature of the intelligible realm i.e., immutable, pre-existent, and divine. The soul also contained three parts, the reason, feelings, and passions, which helped explain man's psychological make-up. (Meno, Phaedo, Republic.)

7. The rational faculty of man's undying soul is that which links him to the supernatural realm of the Ideas. (Republic, Phaedrus.)

8. In Greek thought the adjectives divine, deathless, and indestructible are synonymous with soul and the gods. Plato's notion of the soul also took on the connotation of divinity, and was used along with the term gods to signify that which is more than human.
9. Plato equated the concept of soul with that which gives life to body and motion to the cosmos. (Phaedo, Republic, Phaedrus)

10. In Plato's later dialogues the soul became that aspect of man's being which linked him with the divine and accounted for his rational faculty; in the cosmos it was the necessary first cause in an orderly causal system. (Phaedrus, Timaeus)

11. The concept of God as creator is predicated on the use of soul as divine and as synonymous with the gods. God as soul is the artisan of the universe, limited by the Ideas and the Receptacle. (Timaeus)

12. The existence of the personal God of the Laws is demonstrated by means of the self-motion of the soul, the argument from design, and the universality of belief, the latter two both traditional religious beliefs.

13. The Providence of God and his justice are assumed through the logical conclusions of the existence of God. (Laws)

14. Plato's final conception of the nature and being of God is the result of a development out of the religious thought of early Greece combined with the notion that the soul is that element in man and the cosmos that unites them with the supernatural ground of Being. Plato's own contribution to the nature of God includes him as being perfectly good (Republic); of the nature of soul (Phaedrus); personal (Timaeus); finite creator (Timaeus); and divine (Phaedrus, Republic, Timaeus, and Laws).

15. Plato has exerted a tremendous influence on Christian theology. The concepts of God as spirit or soul, the Logos doctrine, the development of the immortal soul, the theory of creation, cosmic dualism, and Platonic Idealism have all found their way into the development of modern religious thought.
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ABSTRACT

The problem of the thesis is to develop the concept of God in Plato's thought as it grew out of his knowledge of early Greek religion into his mature expression of the meaning of human life and the telic aspects of the cosmos. The development of Plato's deity necessarily had to encompass his epistemology and metaphysics as these aspects of his philosophy combined to render the concept of God a logical possibility.

The thesis begins with an examination of early Greek religion, as it is necessary to understand the antecedent influences that were brought to bear on Plato's thought. Plato was tremendously indebted to the religion of Homer and other early Greek religious writers, and this influence was to pervade his early dialogues. However, the scepticism of his contemporaries provoked Plato to seek a realm of being that was more compatible with his thinking than the naturalism and the solipsism of the Pre-Socratics and the Sophists. The doctrine of Ideas is the result of this search for a divine realm of being. Plato makes a distinction between the static aspect of the supernatural and the dynamic. The Ideas represent the static and metaphysical part of the divine. The gods are hardly mentioned along with the Ideas; they connote
the dynamic in Plato's divinity and do not appear when Plato
gives expression to his metaphysical entities. The concept
of the soul developed early, and its creation made possible
the apprehension of the Ideal realm by man. The tripartite
division of the soul introduces us to Plato's soul psychology.
The soul has the intellect as its highest faculty; it is this
part of man that communicates with the supra-sensual world.
Plato's later conception of the soul found it to be the
originator of all motion and life.

The philosophy of the soul suggests that the soul has
divine potentiality and is that concept that makes possible
man's knowledge of the gods. The notion of God or the gods in
the religious sense is only suggested in the early dialogues.
It is not until the Timaeus that Plato considers the gods
seriously. The Demiurge is the creator God who is responsible
for the creation of the cosmos and all the living things in it.
He is aided by the Forms and hindered by the force of the
Receptacle. In this way the Demiurge is considered a finite
God. The distinction is made in the Timaeus between God and
the gods. God is an uncreated soul who is the creator of the
lesser gods. Throughout Plato's writing there is never any
clear-cut separation between God and the gods. This is in
accord with the traditional religious beliefs. However, Plato
does recognize one uncreated being who is the cause of every
other being. In the Laws Plato establishes the existence of
God by means of his argument for the existence of the soul and the cosmological argument set forth in the Timaeus. In Book Ten of the Laws Plato sums up all the philosophic concepts that came together to formulate his concept of God. He proves the existence of God; the goodness of God; the reality of God's Providence; the immortality of the soul; and the correspondence between man's destiny and God's works. The force of Plato's argument for the existence of God in the Laws rests on his doctrine of Ideas and the philosophy of the soul. Out of Plato's life of philosophical and religious investigations has arisen the most influential and important philosophical questions and theological principles in Western thought.