

Plato : the Essentials

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

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

For Plato, Man (as a member of a species, independent of sex, in Greek, *anthrôpos*) is by nature an animal made to live in society. The basic social unit in Greece in his time was the “city (*polis*)”⁴, so that this social dimension of Man could be expressed by saying that he is a “political animal”, that is, an animal made to live in a *polis*. It can also be said that Plato looks at Man as a *politês* (“citizen”) and that what most interests him is the *politeia*, the kind of life fit for a *politês*, especially, but not exclusively, with regard to one’s “public” life, as well as the organization of the life of all the *politai* (“citizens”) within the “city (*polis*)”, a task expected from the political

¹ Socrates, born around 470/469 BC, was then about seventy years old.

² After the name of the Athenian hero Academos, to which the garden in which he established his school was dedicated.

³ We know next to nothing about the way Plato wrote and organized his dialogues, except for a few scarce indications found in some of them (for instance, that the *Sophist* is the continuation of the *Theaetetus* and the *Statesman* the continuation of the *Sophist*, and also that the *Critias* is the continuation of the *Timaeus*). We also ignore when each one of them was written and possibly “published” (that is, made available to the public at large outside the Academy). The suggestion I’m making here, that they compose a unique work structured in tetralogies, is in fact an *hypothesis* I’m opposing to the prevalent *hypothesis* according to which Plato composed his dialogues as mostly independent works during his whole life, over a period of about fifty years from Socrates death to his own death around 348/347 BC, at age about eighty, and that these dialogues reflect his intellectual evolution over this period of time of about fifty years. The structure in tetralogies I’m proposing is described in appendix 1, page 19.

⁴ As a general rule, when, in this paper, a word between quotes is followed by a word in italics between parentheses, this word is the Greek word corresponding to the preceding English word. When I use directly the Greek word in the text, I italicize it, usually followed by its translation into English between quotes in parentheses. A lexicon of Greek words important for the understanding of Plato is included in the second part of this paper, starting at page 20. It includes among other all the Greek words used in this paper. All the words included in the lexicon appear in the lateral Bookmarks panel of Adobe Reader.

leaders.⁵ Indeed, *Politeia* is the Greek title of the central dialogue of the set of Plato's twenty-eight dialogues, the one constituting their keystone, ill translated into English as "*Republic*".

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

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

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

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

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

The human mind is also capable of recognizing recurrences not only of such clusters, whether named or not, but also of sequences of clusters always occurring in the same order, which leads it to assume necessary or quasi necessary links between the various elements of

⁵ The Greek word *politeia* has this whole range of meanings, both individual and collective.

those sequences and gives birth to the notions of cause and effect. This recognition affords human beings a certain level of practical efficiency by allowing them to set “ends”, “goals” and to devise “methods” to reach them and distribute tasks contributing to the attainment of the objectives. And the fact that not any speech makes it possible to reach the set goals “proves” in a way that language refers, in some cases at least, to something other than itself and that this “something” imposes its law upon it if one wants to reach the set ends.

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

This “objectivity” of an environment (which, for each human being, includes all other human beings) which imposes, up to a certain point, its “law” to our thinking and to our action, is acknowledged by Plato through the use of the Greek word *pathèma* to describe the perceptions of our senses and mind/intelligence (*nous*), since *pathèma* is derived from the verb *paschein*, whose general meaning is “to be acted upon”, “to suffer”, “to be affected”, which leads, for *pathèma*, to “affection” in the general sense of “what affects us one way or another, from a physical, intellectual, aesthetic, moral or sentimental standpoint”. And, by complementarity, to talk about what is at the origin of these “affections”, he uses the word *pragma*, derived from the verb *prattein*, meaning “to act”, precisely in opposition to *paschein* (“be acted upon”), often translated by “thing”, but whose meaning is much broader than this (“fact” would be a more open translation of it). In other words, there exists around us “activators” of our senses and mind/intelligence (*nous*), *pragmata*,⁶ which elicit, without us having anything to do for that, “affections” of them (senses and mind/intelligence), *pathèmata*.⁷

For Plato, these *pathèmata* are not limited to the raw perception by one or another of our senses, or directly by our mind/intelligence (*nous*), of what they are capable of grasping of the *pragma* activating them, but includes the manner in which our mind reacts to these stimulations, what this activation of one of our senses or of our mind/intelligence induces in us.⁸ Two famous images developed in sequence in the *Republic* and complementing one another, the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave, help us better understand this.⁹ The analogy of the line inventories the various *pathèmata* which affect us, using sight as example in the sensible realm and the allegory of the cave illustrates this inventory on the example of human beings as *pragmata* capable of affecting our senses and mind/intelligence.

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

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

⁷ *Pathèmata* is the plural of *pathèma*.

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

⁹ The analogy of the line is found at the end of book VI of the *Republic*, at *Republic* VI, 509d6-511-e5, and the allegory of the cave at the beginning of book VII, at *Republic* VII, 514a1-517a7.

not the whole of what activates it. But the “image (*eikôn*)” formed by our intelligence (*nous*), expressed through the words we use to talk about it, is no more the whole of what we are talking about and the fact that we give it a name doesn’t mean that we “know” it. Here again, we can only grasp an « appearance (*eidos*) », intelligible this time and no longer visible, but still only an appearance, even if it is richer than the mere visible appearance. This is the reason why Plato uses the same word *eidos*, derived from a root meaning “to see”, to talk about them. Indeed, nothing allows us to assume that the case of intelligence might be different from that of sight, hearing, touch or another of our senses, about which we don’t have much trouble admitting that they offer us only a partial grasp of what activates them, even if we tend to privilege sight as a means of “knowing”¹⁰ how these “activators” are. As a matter of fact, since indeed we only have at our disposal the five senses and the mind/intelligence (*nous*) to grasp what is around us, it is impossible for us by design to know if some features of what activates these means of perception escape them all.

The allegory of the cave offers us an illustration of this to help us better understand it. This famous allegory, misunderstood by most scholars, who didn’t take enough time to « decode » all its details, is in fact an illustration of the motto Plato’s Socrates¹¹ made his: “get to know thyself (*gnôthi sauton*)”. It stages *anthrôpoi* (« human beings ») as subjects capable of knowledge in the guise of prisoners chained at the bottom of a cave, unable to turn their head and thus, so long as they stay in this situation, only capable of seeing the wall of the cave facing them. Behind them, along a road, hidden by a wall, *anthrôpoi* walk by, bearing statues of men and other things rising above the wall. Farther away behind them, a fire lights the scene and casts shadows of what rises above the wall on the wall of the cave facing the chained prisoners, so that the only thing they can see are the shadows of the statues rising above the wall along the road. The invisible men bearing these statues and « animating » them by making them move, can also talk and the wall of the cave returns an echo of their voices. The allegory depicts the freeing of one of the prisoners, who is then forced to turn around to look at the statues above the wall, and then to exit from the cave through a lateral opening up high.¹² Outside the cave, the freed prisoner can see *anthrôpoi*, first, so long as he is not yet accustomed to the brightness of the light of the sun, not directly, but through their shadows and reflections on the surface of bodies of water, then, once habituated, directly. But he also discovers stars in the sky and the sun, here again, first seen through reflections on water bodies, then directly.

What must be understood, to properly understand this allegory, is that the prisoners, the bearers in the cave behind the wall and the men outside the cave, all referred to with the word *anthrôpoi*, always in the plural, are the same individuals, only considered from different stand-points. And they are not “men” and “women” in the material sense of the words, but the immaterial principles of movement, life and intelligibility which “animate” these creatures, called *psuchai*¹³ by Plato, a word usually translated by “souls” but which shouldn’t be understood too readily in the sense it has taken in Christian tradition. The prisoners stand for these *psuchai* as

¹⁰ In Greek, one of the verbs meaning « to know », *eidenai*, is in fact a past form of a verb meaning “to see”, *idein*: “I saw”, thus “I know”.

¹¹ « Plato’s Socrates » means the Socrates who is staged by Plato all through his dialogues, which are not journalistic reports on actual events of the historical Socrates’ life, but literary creation of Plato, intent on illustrating what he wants us to understand in a way which remains true to the *spirit* rather than the letter of his “teacher”: the historical Socrates probably never said the things Plato has the character Socrates of his dialogues say in the conversations he stages in his dialogues, with the specific words and in the specific contexts described in them, not even those he has him say at his trial.

¹² The exit from the cave is on the side, not behind the fire as usually depicted in graphic illustrations of the allegory, which means that the prisoner, to exit the cave, doesn’t have to go on the other side of the wall along the road which hides the bearers.

¹³ *Psuchai* is the plural of the Greek word *psuchè*, which is the root of the English prefix “psych(o)-” found in such words as “psychology” or “psychiatrist”. In the *Alcibiades*, Socrates has young Alcibiades, his interlocutor in this dialogue, agree that man (*anthrôpos*) is neither the body, nor the combination of body and *psuchè*, but *psuchè* alone, for which the body is no more than a “tool” (*Alcibiades*, 129e3-130c7).

capable of knowledge, as I said already; the bearers and the *anthrôpoi* outside the cave are these *psuchai* as objects of knowledge for themselves and for the other *psuchai*. As bearers behind the wall inside the cave, they illustrate the fact that they are what « animates » the material creatures whose *psuchai* they are but that, so long as we stay in the visible/sensible realm, they are invisible, since they are not material. The only things that are visible inside the cave are the bodies they animate, the statues, and especially the statues of men, and, to begin with, only the visible appearance of these statues, pictured by the shadows they cast on the wall of the cave facing the prisoners left in their chains. More generally speaking, their sensible trace includes also, among other, the sounds they produce, whose echo the wall of the cave returns to the chained prisoners, as a kind of audible “reflection”. Plato doesn’t go further in the allegory regarding senses. If he refers to sounds, it is because they are indispensable to introduce the *logos*, prerequisite of an access to the intelligible, which he introduces among the chained prisoners, saying that, since they are capable of dialoguing (*dialegethai*), they give names to the shadows they see.

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

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

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

¹⁵ *Eidè* is the plural of *eidōs*. An *eidōs*, whether visible or intelligible, is not the specific perception that a given person, with the defects and limitations of the organs of perception of that person (for instance the fact that the person might be color blind, in the visible realm, or of very limited intelligence, in the intelligible realm), may have of what he/she perceive through one or another of his/her senses or through intelligence, but what is perceptible of it by this organ (one of the senses or intelligence) supposed to be at its highest level of perfection for a human being. In other words, it is what the nature of this organ makes it possible to perceive, not what a specific instance of this organ, whichever it may be, is capable of perceiving. It is in that sense that the *eidè* may be thought of as having an “objective” reality.

way, without getting trapped by them, that is, have become masters in the art of dialoguing (*to dialegesthai*), individuals described by Plato's Socrates as *dialektikoi*, a word usually improperly translated, or rather transcribed, as "dialecticians" by people unable, especially after Hegel, to explain what the "dialectic" Plato is talking about is.

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

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

The progress of the freed prisoner doesn't end with the sight of the *anthrôpoi* themselves and all that surrounds them outside the cave, which are the intelligible dimension of all that can be seen inside the cave. There remains the heavens and stars, and above all, the sun which made the vision of all there was to be seen outside the cave possible. These "activators" of our intelligence don't have a sensible counterpart inside the cave.¹⁶ They picture what we would call nowadays abstract « concepts », with no sensible dimension, such as "good", "beautiful", "just", what Plato's Socrates calls *ideai* ("ideas").¹⁷ These "ideas (*ideai*)" are in fact a special kind of *eidè* ("appearances"), purely intelligible, and are not limited to "qualities" such as those I took as examples above. In fact, all the words we use refer to an *idea* corresponding to the principle of intelligibility of what the word designates, but if, at *Republic* X, 596a6-7, Plato says that "*we are in the habit of positing some unique eidōs for each of the many [things] upon which we impose the same name*", moving from the fact of experience of the shared name to the *eidōs*, rather than to the *idea*, it is because, as he and Socrates say in the allegory of the cave, names are created by the prisoners for the shadows they see¹⁸ and thus, they do it based on the purely visible "appearance" pictured by the shadows, not based on a real knowledge of what they name, on a perfect understanding of the principles of intelligibility of what they give those names to, thus based on something which is only an *eidōs*, not yet an *idea*.¹⁹ And indeed, Plato's Socrates is not afraid of talking of an *idea* of such a trivial thing as what is designated by the word "bed", that is, of

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

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

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

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

something which is not even a product of nature, but an artefact manufactured by man.²⁰

In fact, more than the words which might be used to designate what the stars in heaven stand for in the allegory, the important point is that we are not in a binary scheme setting two “worlds” in opposition, with on the one side what is inside the cave (the visible/sensible “world”) and on the other side pure abstract “ideas” outside the cave (the “world of ideas” we are used to associate with Plato), but in a scheme where everything present in the cave, that is, material creatures, is found *also* outside the cave²¹ and constitutes a mandatory pathway before turning toward the heaven of “ideas”.²²

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

Another thing the identification of the stars as picturing the ideas behind the words we use could teach us is that, in the same way stars, which all look alike, cannot be identified individually, independently of one another, but only through their relative position with respect to all others, words and “ideas” they refer to cannot be understood independently of one another, but only based on the relations they have with one another. Thus, there is no use trying to figure out what this or that star in heaven stands for since, to a naked eye, they all look alike (except the moon and the sun): heaven only makes sense for us as a whole in which only clusters of

²⁰ This occurs in the section of the *Republic* introduced by the sentence I quoted earlier in this paragraph, often referred to as “the three kinds of beds” (*Republic* X, 595c7-598c6), because Socrates, in order to make us understand what he means by “imitation”, takes the example of beds and distinguishes the “concept” of bed (what the second segment of the intelligible gives us access to), the manufactured beds produced by craftsmen and the pictures of beds painted by painters, which are all referred to with the same word: “bed”. In this explanation, he call *idea* what the craftsman manufacturing a bed has in mind, that is, not a blueprint or a model for a specific bed, with dimensions, information on the materials to be used, and so on, but indeed the “*idea*” of what a bed is in general, what it is intended for, which allows him to conceive any kind of bed and to make plans for their manufacturing. From this standpoint, it is worth noting that Socrates, at the start of his explanation, mentions two kinds of manufactured objects, beds and tables. Now, it turns out that the Greek word translated by “bed” is *klinè*, derived from the verb *klinein* meaning “lean, lie down, recline, lie upon (something)”, and that the Greek word translated by “table” is *trapeza*, whose etymological meaning is “having four feet/legs”. In other words, one of the objects, *klinè* (“bed”), is named after its purpose and the other, *trapeza* (“table”), after its external appearance. And it is the one named after its purpose, *klinè* (“bed”) which he retains alone for the continuation of his explanation, as if to help us understand that the *idea* has nothing to do with the external appearance, which indeed is different for each different object having the same name, even if they all have something in common in their “appearance”.

²¹ If, in the allegory itself, Socrates is not explicit about what the freed prisoner leaving the cave can see aside from *anthrôpoi* before turning toward the heavens, and simply adds “*and the other* [things]” (516a7), when he recalls the allegory a few pages later, at *Republic* VII, 532b9, he is more explicit and mentions animals (*zôia*, whose primary meaning is “living [creature]”) and plants (*phuta*, whose primary meaning is “what grows”), without even explicitly mentioning human beings, which are “animals/living creatures” among other.

²² In the allegory, which describes a temporal as well as intellectual progression, the first step once outside the cave is to get accustomed to see the human beings and the rest, first through shadows and reflections, then in themselves, before turning toward the heavens in a later stage, first at night, then during daylight.

stars are identifiable. And similarly, words taken in isolation mean nothing; only “constellations” of words, that is, sentences and speeches, may potentially have meaning, if the relationship between *ideai* they suggest correspond to the actual relationship between these *ideai*.

The key issue then is to figure out how we can determine whether this is the case or not. Regarding material beings, animate or inanimate objects, perceptible by senses, acquired habit and shared experience through dialogue (which instills this habit from infancy) usually allow us to figure that out without much difficulty. On the contrary, as soon as we deal with abstract “concepts”, things are not that simple and the risk of subjectivity is great. For Plato, what allows us to avoid such subjectivity is the existence, in the purely intelligible realm, of an “idea” which has for human beings an unquestionable “objectivity”, the idea of the “good”. Not moral Good, or not exclusively, but « good » in its broadest sense, including “good” things at the material level.²³ In the section of the *Republic* immediately preceding the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave, Socrates draws a parallel between the good and the sun and, in its commentary of the allegory, he explicitly identifies the fire inside the cave with the sun and less categorically the sun outside the cave with the idea of the good.²⁴ The starting point of this parallel between good and sun is the *observation* that any human being always acts in view of what he deems good *for oneself*.²⁵ And it doesn’t matter whether they are right or wrong because any human being can recognize that what (s)he does at some point in time deeming it good *for oneself*, may turn out to have consequences (s)he will deem bad *for oneself*, here again, *according to one’s own criteria* of “good” and “bad”, whether they be right or wrong. In other words, everybody wants what is good for oneself and may experience the fact that it is not sufficient to *believe* something good for it to be so in all its consequences, according to one’s own criteria of good and bad. In short, we can’t decide what is good and bad *for us* and yet, the good *for oneself* is what we are all looking for.

What the parallel between good and sun tries to make us understand is that, in the same way the light of the sun²⁶ is required for functional eyes to see, what gives meaning to what a human intelligence is capable of grasping is the idea of the good. To say it differently, intelligence is the tool given human beings to allow them to find *together* their way toward what is good for

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

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

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

²⁶ We could say « the light », without being more specific, but, in the time of Plato, available “artificial” lights, all using fire one way or another, were much less powerful than those existing nowadays and the difference between seeing in the light of the sun and seeing under artificial light was such that indeed, the only way to properly see something was to look at it in broad daylight under the light of the sun.

them, toward the *good* life, that is, “happiness” for each one. Its purpose is not the knowledge of what *is* as such, for the mere sake of knowing, but the search of what is *good* to lighten their path through life and guide them toward their perfection.²⁷ What is the most important for human beings is not to know where they come from and how the Universe around them developed from some primordial principle, but to look toward the future and always look for the best for them so as to enlighten the decisions they will make in a near and remote future. Knowledge without the light of the good, what we nowadays call “science”, can only answer “how to” questions, “how to do this or that?”, not “why”, “for what purpose”, questions, “why do this rather than that?”, which are in fact the only ones we should take interest in, since we cannot change the past, while our future, individual and collective, depends in large part on us and the decisions we make, individually and collectively.

But trying to see what surrounds us in the “light” of the good doesn’t mean trying to “look” at the good itself: in the visible realm, looking at the sun is not the best way to see what it lights, human beings around us in particular, quite the contrary since it might ruin our sight; similarly, in the intelligible realm, investigating what “the good itself”²⁸ might be would teach us nothing and might at best make us pseudo-philosophers having understood nothing about true “philosophy”. The idea suggested by the allegory of the cave that the contemplation of the sun itself might be the ultimate stage of the ascent of the freed prisoner is a “test” put there by Plato to see if we have properly understood what he tries to make us understand, since everybody knows full well that to “*see clearly the sun itself by itself in its own space and contemplate [it] as it is*”,²⁹ as he suggests in the allegory, is impossible for human eyes and could only make them blind. Plato, in his dialogues, never undertakes such a search³⁰ and, when he focuses on the “good” in the introductory dialogue of the last tetralogy, the *Philebus*, it is on the good *for human beings*, not the good *in itself*. He is not looking for *the* “good”, even less for the (moral) “Good” with a capital “G”, in the abstract, but for what makes a good life *for human beings*. And he finds it in a mix providing each part of man its due, that is, *just*, share of “good”, a mix of material pleasure in due proportion and of intellectual satisfaction in a properly oriented use of intelligence, that is, enlightened by the “good”, turned toward the future and the search for the good life.

The purpose of human intelligence, then, is not to attempt to know what *is*, but what is *good*; it is not to focus on “being (*to on*)”, but on “beingness³¹ (*ousia*)”, that is, the “value” of each

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

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

²⁹ *Republic* VII, 516b4-7.

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

³¹ The meaning of this probable neologism that I coin, after the model of the Greek word *ousia*, substantive derived from the feminine form *ousa* of the present participle of the verb *einai* (“to be”; *on* is the neuter form, which I translate as “being”), from the present participle “being” of the English “to be”, will become clearer as we proceed. The usual translation by “essence”, which is the transcription in English of the neologism coined in Latin by Cicero from *esse* (“to be”), precisely to translate into Latin the Greek word *ousia* he was reading in Plato, would only cloud the issue after twenty-five centuries of commentaries of Plato and of philosophy.

“being” with regard to the good. Plato faces us, in a daunting dialogue, the *Parmenides*, with the emptiness of any speech on Being which has not been preceded by a reflection on the mechanics and limits of *logos* (“language, speech”), reflections he precisely conducts in the central dialogue of the trilogy introduced by the *Parmenides* and dedicated to the art of *to dialegesthai*, the *Sophist*. For him, “to be (*einai*)” is only a function word used to assign to a “being (*on*)”, that is, to a “subject”, a “beingness (*ousia*)”, that is, a “predicative expression”, and nothing more.³² Used without an explicit predicative expression, *einai* (« to be ») means nothing and can have a meaning only because one or more predicative expressions are *implicitly* assumed (“material” or “living” or “visible” or “tangible” being, or on the contrary, “eternal” or “immaterial or “unchanging” as opposed to “becoming”, and so on) and it is the fact that these predicative expressions are *implicit*, and thus not necessarily the same for all, and, for the same speaker, not necessarily the same from one speech to the other, which makes it possible to demonstrate anything and its contrary about being with the same logical rigor, as Parmenides brilliantly shows in the dialogue named after him.³³

It is the “light” of the good which allows us to move from “being” to *ousia* (“beingness”), that is, from a word which teaches us nothing since it can be applied to everything without exception (a man “is” a man, a cat “is” a cat, a word “is” a word, an idea “is” an idea, and so on) to a word which introduces the idea of “value”: indeed, the word *ousia*, though derived from the present participle of the verb *einai* (“to be”),³⁴ had, in the time of Socrates and Plato; the meaning of “property, wealth, substance (in the sense of material possessions)”, implicitly importing in language the idea that we are what we own and that the “value” of a human being is his/her material wealth. Plato plays with this meaning of the word *ousia* to try to reorient it toward a value which is no longer material: if a human being is not one’s body, but one’s immaterial *psuchè* (the *anthrôpoi* of the allegory of the cave), one’s “good” cannot be a *material* wealth and we should search elsewhere what is really a “wealth/substance (*ousia*)” for him/her.³⁵ And what can guide us in this quest is the idea of the good (*hè tou agathou idea*) since the good is in the end what we seek in all cases and material wealth (*ousia* in the usual sense) is but a means toward other things deemed, rightly or wrongly, “good”, while the good is never sought as a

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

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

³⁴ See note 31 above.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁹ The case of the *politikos* is dealt with in the dialogues explicitly identified as the continuation of the *Sophist*, whose title it is (the *Statesman*, or *Politicus*, in English), where the Elean stranger once again leads the discussion.

art of plausible and convincing speech with no care for truth, as taught by Gorgias and his likes, and the true “dialectical” art,⁴⁰ the art of the dialogue capable of leading to truth, especially on the good, which is the specific art of the *philosophos* as conceived by Plato.

The starting point of the stranger in this “building” of true philosophy is what I call the principle of selective associations: we are neither the parts of a big undifferentiated whole in which everything gets confused with everything else (Parmenides’ doctrine pushed to its limit) nor “monads” unable to any sort of communication with one another in a “Universe” in which nothing “mixes” with anything else, but in a “whole” in which some “beings (*onta*)” have “relations” with others, but not all beings all possible relations with all other beings.⁴¹ And words are “beings (*onta*)” among others, which cannot be assembled any way you’d like if you want to produce more than noise, that is, meaning, assembling words in a way consistent with the relations (expressed by verbs) they pretend to describe between subjects they pretend to point at (expressed by nouns).

The test of truth is then made through shared experience in dialogue. In the background of the presentation of the principle of selective associations is this fact, of which the stranger is quite certain based on what he knows of the doctrines of the thinkers he has in mind, without having to submit it to one more specific experience, which is that none of them, and in the end nobody, would accept the statement that “rest is the same as movement”, whatever the precise meaning each one gives to the words “rest (*stasis*)” and “movement (*kinesis*)”.⁴²

In the application of the principle to the specific case of *logos*, he first states that, for a sentence to have meaning, it must associate at least a name (*onoma*) and a verb (*rhèma*), that is, a “subject” to an “action”,⁴³ before giving two examples of minimal sentences: ‘*Theaetetus sits*⁴⁴ (*Theaitètos kathètai*, 263a2)’ and ‘*Theaetetus, with whom I myself am now dialoguing,*

⁴⁰ *Dialektikos* in Greek, transcribed in English as “dialectic”, is an adjective formed after the verb *dialegesthai*, meaning “to dialogue”, with the suffix *-ikos* indicating a manner of doing things. To be *dialektikos* means to be able to practice dialogue in an efficient manner, without being trapped by words, so as to reach what is beyond them, that is, *eidè* and most of all *ideai*. When the adjective is used in the feminine with the article as a substantive, in the form *hè dialektikè* (implied *technè*), translated into English as “dialectic” or “dialectics”, it designates for Plato the art allowing someone to be *dialektikos*, that is, to reach truth through dialogue. But it is not so much a specific oratory “technique”, a specific manner of conducting a discussion based on strictly codified “methods”, as it is a disposition of the mind toward *logos* and words which must guide the *philosophos* in any search for the truth through dialogue.

⁴¹ This principle is introduced in the most general possible way at *Sophist*, 251d5-252e7, in a section where Plato keeps deliberately changing words to describe what I call “relations”, precisely to show that his explanations are all-encompassing; then it is reformulated through an example where the stranger uses five of the broadest “notions”, “being”, “same”, “other”, “rest” and “movement” (*Sophist*, 253b9-258c6), here again deliberately varying the words he uses to talk about what I have called “notions”, so as to accommodate all the potential interlocutors, not because, for him, these words would be synonymous, but because, *in this specific context and with regard to what he wants to show*, they are *interchangeable*. He uses alternatively the words *gene* (“sorts, families”), *eidè* (“appearances, kinds, species”), *ideai* (“appearances, ideas”), *phusei* (“natures”), or *ousiai* (“beingnesses”), going so far as to change words within the same sentence (thus at 257a9, he talks of “the nature of sorts (*hè tôn genôn phusis*)”); some of these words (*phusis*, derived from *phuein* (“to grow”), and *genos*, derived from *gignesthai* (“to be born, to become”)) referring more specifically to the material dimension of the world in becoming, others (*eidos* et *idea*) to the intelligible unchanging realm. Eventually, it is applied to the special case of words and *logos* (*Sophist*, 261d1-263d4), the stranger claiming that *logos* “*is one of the sorts of beings (tôn ontôn hen ti genôn einia)*” (*Sophist*, 260a5-6) and thus that the general principle applies also to these specific “beings” which words are, as building blocks of *logos*.

⁴² For the Greeks of Plato’s time, as can be seen in Aristotle’s works, the notion of *kinesis* (“movement”) was much broader than mere spatial movement and included processes such as change without spatial movement, generation and so on.

⁴³ As can be seen from the first example the stranger then takes, “action” must be taken here in a broad sense including “states” implying an absence of movement. In previous examples, the stranger has shown that a list of juxtaposed names without verb, or of verbs without name, could not make up a meaningful *logos*.

⁴⁴ This note in the French original is specific to the French, where no single verb exists to translate the Greek *kathètai*, so that it must be translated with a combination of the French equivalent of *einai* (“être”, “to be in English) along with a predicate adjective (“assis”, “sitting” in English), which poses a problem in a context where

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

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

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

einai ("être" in French, "to be" in English) plays such a major role. So I don't translate it, but leave the note anyway to keep the note numbering identical in French and English.

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

⁴⁶ At *Republic* VI, 505d11-e4, in the prelude to the parallel between good and sun, Socrates describes the good as "that which every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does all [things], auguring it to be something, but being at a loss and unable to grasp appropriately what in the world it is and to possess a stable belief about it as about other [things], and for this very reason unable to determine about other [things] if it is something beneficial."

sense of the word, certain and communicable knowledge, only in the light of the good, meaning that to know is to understand in what way each thing, each action, each “attribute”, each anything, is “good” for us, and we are not able to be certain about the good, then we can’t “know” anything. Hence the “I know nothing” of Plato’s Socrates: “I know, in the strongest sense of “know”, nothing of what only counts as “knowledge” for me and would allow me to live a perfectly good life within the limits of what nature gave me”. To “know” a theorem of geometry, or any purely technical knowledge whose validity can be ascertained by practical experience, has no “value” whatsoever for us so long as we don’t possess the criteria allowing us to determine whether the use we could make of this “knowledge” is good for us or not.

Yet it is such a knowledge that we would like to find in leaders. For indeed, their role is to promote and maintain conditions allowing the greatest number of inhabitants of the city to be as happy as possible and to allow them to get the best from the capabilities nature has endowed them with to reach the excellence (*aretè*) they make possible for them. Plato is perfectly clear, especially in the work which ends the cycle of the dialogues, the *Laws*, on the fact that the citizens are not at the service of the City,⁴⁷ but that the city, as the setting of their life designed by them, and thus its leaders, is at the service of the citizens to allow them to best develop their potentialities and reach their “perfection”. If Plato talks, in the *Timaeus*, of a World’s soul, nowhere does he talk of a “City’s soul”. The city (*polis*) is but a product of human beings activity at the service of human beings and the happiness of all of them, a happiness which must realize a proper balance between the happiness of the ones and the others, in the same way each one individually must realize within oneself a proper balance in the satisfaction of the needs and desires of the different parts of oneself which the different parts of one’s tripartite *psuchè* (“soul”), as described in the *Republic* and pictured in the *Phaedrus* through the image of the winged chariot,⁴⁸ are: any human *psuchè* includes a reasoning part, the *logistikon*, whose tool is the *logos*, hence its name; a many-sided part resulting from its inhabitation in a body, geared toward the satisfaction of corporeal desires depending on choices and decisions (hunger, thirst, sexual appetite, primarily, as opposed to respiration, digestion, for instance, which take place in a reflex manner), *epithumiai* (“desires”, plural);⁴⁹ and in between a part he names *thumos*, which represents a principle of action not grounded in reason and not resulting from corporeal needs, but stirred by symbolic representations, words or images, something like self-esteem, the sense of honor, whose affections may lead from our part to potentially violent instant reactions, in the form of heroic deeds as well as uncontrolled aggressiveness. The image Socrates gives of this « soul » in the *Phaedrus* is that of a winged chariot drawn by two horses driven by a charioteer. One of the two horses is black, spirited and stubborn, the other white and quieter, more willing to obey the instructions of the charioteer. The chariot stands for the body, the charioteer for the *logistikon* part of the *psuchè*, the black horse stands for the *epithumiai* (the desires) and the white horse for the *thumos*. The wings suggest that the human *psuchè* may rise toward the heavens, that is, toward the divine. Reason alone (the charioteer) cannot move the chariot/body. Only the horses can. Thus, the charioteer must manage to bring the two horses under control, especially the black one, and have them move in the same direction, the one he shows them, short of what the chariot will go nowhere and move randomly in all directions.

⁴⁷ They are not at the service of the « City » conceived as a distinct “being” which would transcend them and whose future and survival would be more important than those of the citizens individually, but they are at the service of *each other* in the perspective of the good of all.

⁴⁸ See *Republic* IV, 436a8-441c3 and *Phaedrus*, 246a7-b4 et 253c7-e5.

⁴⁹ Plato uses a plural to talk about it to show that it is in fact the gathering of a multiplicity of distinct desires, but of desires which are not properly speaking conflicting with one another, except sometimes for questions of priority (in which order satisfy them if they happen to occur simultaneously), hence the choice of Plato to look at them as a single “part”, which is nonetheless principle of multiplicity, contrary to reason, principle of unity, which, as far as it is concerned, can be in conflict with corporeal desires and restrain them, pure and simple.

The *Republic* as a whole describes what constitutes the ideal of this animal endowed with reason and bound to live in society which human beings (*anthrôpoi*), or rather, their *psuchai* as embodied, are, and this is justice, not justice in the narrow sense of a regulator of social relations, but justice conceived as the inner harmony of this tripartite soul (each part being “just” with the other two parts) as the foundation and prerequisite of social harmony in the city. The role of the leaders is to build the framework of this social harmony in the city through laws. This is the reason why we should choose as leaders, if not those who “know” what is *really* good for human beings, individually and collectively, since, as we have seen, such a knowledge is out of reach of human nature, at least those, men as well as women,⁵⁰ who, at the end of a lengthy process of education and training and successive selections, have shown the greatest aptitude in the search for a better understanding of these notions, that is, have demonstrated they are “philosophers” in the sense Plato gives this word, that is, tireless seekers of a “wisdom (*sophia*)” they know they will never reach in plenitude but yet lovers (*philoï*) of it, willing to dedicate their whole life to it in cooperation with those who are like them, to progress toward it through the sharing of experience through dialogue. And if these lovers of wisdom agree to dedicate part of their time to take charge in the government of the city, it is because they have understood that being governed by people who don’t have the required qualifications, who are less advanced than they are in the quest for wisdom, would be less good for them than accepting this burden, which they would much prefer not to have to assume if it were possible and better for them.⁵¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵³ *Dèmiourgos* means etymologically “working for the people”, that is “craftsman”.

⁵⁴ This understanding is provided in the *Timaeus* through what might be considered the first mathematical model of matter, in which the four basic element from which everything is built (air, water, earth and fire) are themselves built from triangles, that is *forms*. This model makes us laugh nowadays owing to its lack of “scientific” relevance, but it should be noted that its author doesn’t take himself/it too seriously since he himself calls it a “myth”, and besides, that its purpose was not to develop a “scientific” (in the modern sense) understanding of matter making it possible for us to act on it, but to present a finalist approach of this creation inspirational for our work of lawmakers striving for the good. Thus, what mattered for him was to account for the order (*kosmos*) and harmony of the Universe through images and symbols.

⁵⁵ See *Timaeus*, 37d5.

⁵⁶ As a matter of fact, in the dialogue, the four understandings are introduced in the reverse order of the one I use here to present them.

does Socrates, as an ideal for both inner and social life. The *Sophist* draws between the lines the portrait of the philosopher worthy of that name, which is not the completely unjust pseudo-philosopher depicted at the center of the *Theaetetus*, and provides the instructions for use of his/her working tool, *logos*. The *Statesman*, which comes next, theorizes the action of such a philosopher-king and the last tetralogy shows him going back down into the cave⁵⁷ through an *example* of his/her practical activity given in the *Laws*. But this answer was already present between the lines ever since the first trilogy, exploring in dialogues whose interlocutors are teenagers, thus at a level suitable for beginners, the building blocks of the expression *philosophos anèr* (“philosophic man”) used by Theorodorus in the *Sophist* to introduce the stranger from Elea which replaces Socrates to “kill” in thought his fellow citizen Parmenides in what he himself calls a “parricide”,⁵⁸ so as to get philosophy out of the rut of ontology: the *Lysis* deals with *philia* (“friendship”), the *Charmides*, not yet with *sophia*, but more modestly with teenagers, with its version for kids, *sôphrosunè* (“soundness of mind, moderation”),⁵⁹ and, in between, the *Laches* deals with *andreia* (“courage/manhood”), the fact of being an *anèr*, a “man/male”.⁶⁰

And if all this educational program for “philosopher-kings” is developed by Plato in the form of *dialogues*, it is, in quite a consistent way with what he is trying to make us understand through them, because dialogue is the birthplace of *logos* and the *only* way at our disposal, as human beings, to put to the test the relevance of our words and their adequacy to what they purport to describe. Plato doesn’t ask us to take at face value all he has is Socrates, the Elean stranger or the old Athenian of the *Laws* say, but to enter in *dialogue* with them and their interlocutors and to dare take side in their debates. This way of proceeding is that which seemed to him closest to an actual dialogue, which is the only way to practice *philosophia*. At the beginning of the *Statesman*,⁶¹ Socrates suggests that, after a dialogue between him and Theaetetus (the *Theaetetus*, on “knowledge (*epistèmè*)”), followed, the next day, with the same participants⁶² plus the Elean stranger brought along by Theodorus, by a dialogue between the stranger and Theaetetus on the theme of the sophist (the *Sophist*) and a dialogue between the stranger and young Socrates on the theme of the statesman (the *Statesman*), a final dialogue might take place between himself and his young namesake, without saying what this ultimate dialogue might be about. Since, at the

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

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

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

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

⁶¹ See *Statesman*, 258a3-6.

⁶² Socrates, Théodorus of Cyrene and two of his young students, Theaetetus, which, we are told, physically, that is, in the visible realm, resembles Socrates (*Theaetetus*, 143e7-9), and another teenager friend of Theaetetus, also named Socrates, and thus resembles him by name, that is, in the intelligible realm.

beginning of the *Sophist*, Socrates suggested that the stranger explain how his fellow citizens⁶³ understand the three words “sophist”, “statesman” and “philosopher” and what their opinion is about these types, all scholars deduce from this that this last dialogue should have dealt with the philosopher and assume Plato had in mind an extra dialogue called the *Philosopher*, which would have been lost or never written, not seeing that the philosopher is also the theme of the *Sophist*, but that it is to the reader to figure that out.⁶⁴ The young Socrates who should dialogue with the old Socrates is in fact the reader of the dialogues and their dialogue is the one Plato hopes the reader to conduct while reading *all* the dialogues of the cycle, and what Socrates invites us to do through this remark is to read anew all the earlier dialogues in the light of what is about to be said in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*. The *Philosopher* has indeed been written by Plato and has not been lost: it is the whole set of the twenty-eight dialogues.

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

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

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

Appendix 1: the structure of Plato's dialogues

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

	<i>Prelude</i>	Trilogy		
		<i>epithumiai</i> (desires) <i>phusis</i> (nature) “physics”	<i>thumos</i> (self-esteem) <i>krisis</i> (judgment) “ethics”	<i>logos</i> (reason) <i>kosmos</i> (order) “logic”
Tetralogy 1 Setting off <i>who should govern?</i>	ALCIBIADES exposition of the problem	LYSIS friendship (<i>philo-</i>)	LACHES manhood/being a man (<i>andreia</i>)	CHARMIDES wisdom (<i>-sophos</i>)
Tetralogy 2 The sophists <i>eikasia</i> (conjecture)	PROTAGORAS relativism	HIPPIAS Major illusion of beauty	HIPPIAS Minor illusion of “hero”	GORGIAS illusion of <i>logos</i>
Tetralogy 3 Socrates' trial <i>pistis</i> (belief/faith)	MENO pragmatism	EUTHYPHRO letter of the law	APOLOGY law in action	CRITO spirit of the law
Tetralogy 4 the soul <i>psuchè</i>	SYMPOSIUM the driving force : <i>eros</i>	PHAEDRUS nature of the soul: <i>eros</i> ↔ <i>logos</i>	REPUBLIC behavior of the soul: justice	PHAEDO destiny of the soul: <i>ousia</i>
Tetralogy 5 speech (<i>logos</i>) <i>dianoia</i> (reflexion)	CRATYLUS Words	IO <i>logos</i> of the poet	EUTHYDEMUS <i>logos</i> of the sophist	MENEXENUS <i>logos</i> of the politician
Tetralogy 6 <i>to dialegesthai</i> <i>noèsis/epistèmè</i> (knowledge)	PARMENIDES the traps of logic	THEAETETUS the limits of “scientific” knowledge	SOPHIST the laws of <i>logos</i>	STATESMAN the goal of reason
Tetralogy 7 man in the world <i>kosmos</i> (order)	PHILEBUS the good <i>for Man</i>	TIMAEUS the model (<i>paradeigma</i>)	CRITIAS the choice (<i>krisis</i>)	LAWS action (<i>erga</i>)

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

Appendix 2: lexicon of Greek words important for understanding Plato

I have included in this lexicon words particularly important in the dialogues, but I'm not trying to look for a "technical" meaning that these words might have for Plato, but on the contrary to explore the range of meanings of each word since Plato, even when he "specializes" a word in a specific context, never loses sight of the other possible meanings of the word (see for instance the case of ousia), precisely to be able to play with it on occasion. This is what makes the translation into English (or any other language) difficult since in most cases, no English word candidate for the translation of one or another meaning of a Greek word has the same range of meanings, which leads to losing some or all of the overtones Plato is playing with. This is why, in the above paper, I keep some Greek words, even at the cost of giving one of its possible translations between parentheses, or on the contrary to use an English word followed by the Greek word it purports to translate. The most obvious example of this difficulty is the case of the Greek word logos, for which each specialized translation into English based on context suppresses the many overtones the word had in Greek. In fact, one way of describing Plato's dialogues is to see them as a lengthy reflection on logos as what distinguishes human beings from all other animals: what is logos, how does it work, what does it allow us to grasp beyond the words it is made up of and of what use might it be to help us live our lives of human beings? Thus Plato doesn't want the least to fix a unique and precise meaning for each word, but tries on the contrary to play with the flexibility, vagueness and ambiguity of language to help us go beyond words to reach what they somehow attempt to point at. But this doesn't mean he is not careful in choosing his words, far from it, whether to keep using a specific word in a given context or on the contrary to deliberately vary his vocabulary when he doesn't want a given word to become "technical" by specialization. Two examples will make this clearer. In the allegory of the cave, Socrates says about the chained anthrōpoi that they are capable of dialegesthai ("dialogue", Republic VII, 515b4) and that, as a result, they give names to the shadows they see moving in front of them; on the other hand, about the anthrōpoi hidden behind the wall and bearing statues and artefacts showing above the wall, he says that some of them talk, using the verb phtheggesthai (515a2, 515b8, 515b9). This verb may mean "to talk" when the subject is an human being, but it has a much broader sense, and can be used about animals and even about things in the general sense of "to make a noise". This way, Plato makes a difference between the anthrōpoi as thinking beings capable of knowledge (the prisoners), who produce a logos having meaning and dialogue with one another, and the anthrōpoi as objects of knowledge (the bearers behind the wall in the cave), whose speeches are only, as physical phenomena in the sensible world depicted by the interior of the cave, noises among other. And what proves that this is not merely a stylistic device and a random choice to avoid monotony is that he reuses three times the verb phtheggesthai, always about the bearers, including twice in the same sentence within a few words. But when one of the prisoners is freed and a conversation ensues with one of those who freed him, he returns to the verb legein (root of logos, 515d2). Thus, Plato makes a clear distinction between speech as an audible physical phenomenon ("noises") and speech as intelligible (a logos) and chooses the appropriate verb depending on which viewpoint on speech he wants to stress in each case (this distinction is indeed not limited to the allegory of the cave and, in most cases, when Plato uses the verb phtheggesthai about human beings in the dialogues, it is to refer to speech as an acoustic phenomenon). On the contrary, when, in the Sophist, the stranger examines possible combinations of five notions he has taken as examples (being, same, different, rest, movement, Sophist, 253b9-258c6) and wants his reasoning to assume no prior "ontology" and be acceptable to "sons of the earth" as well as "friends of eidè" and having the broadest possible bearing, to name from a generic standpoint what may "partake" in certain "mixes" but not in others, he deliberately keeps changing vocabulary, using at times words appealing to the sons of the earth, phusis ("nature", derived from the verb phuein meaning "to grow") and genos ("family, kind", derived from the verb gignesthai, meaning "to be born, to become"), at times words more likely to please "friends of eidè", eidos itself and idea, at still other times a more neutral word which might satisfy both, ousia ("beingness"). And this doesn't mean that to him, these words are synonymous, but that the principle he is presenting works no matter which one of these words is chosen and what the exact meaning assumed for it is. Whether one thinks of rest and movement as "natures (phusei)", "kinds (gene)", "appearances (eidè)", "ideas (ideai)" or "beingnesses (ousiai)", whether a materialist ("son of the earth") or an idealist ("friend of eidè"), and whatever the meaning assumed for "rest (stasis)" and "movement (kinesis)", no one can accept that "rest is the same as movement" and everybody would accept that "rest is different from movement", which is enough to prove that words cannot be assembled any way one wants and that there is an "externality" imposing its law to language for it to have meaning and say the "truth (alètheia)".

Agathos (adjective; neuter agathon): "good" in all the senses of the word, physical as well as moral; the neuter form used with the article as a substantive, **to agathon**, is used by Plato to designate "the good" as what gives value to everything, not limited to some sort of moral Good with a capital "G", since for him, there is a "good" of the body as well as a "good" of the soul, and indeed of each part of the soul, desires as well as reason. In the plural, **ta agatha** refers to the multiplicity of "good things/attitudes/actions/thoughts/...", that is, to all the instances of whatever may be said to be "good". For Plato, **to agathon** is to the intelligence what the sun (and more generally,

light) is to sight, to the extent that any human beings always seeks what is good for him/her in all his actions, not as a means toward something else, but as an end, and that intelligence is given human beings to reach this goal.

Alètheia (noun): “truth”. The word is a substantive derived from the adjective *alèthès*, whose etymological meaning is “not hidden”, “unveiled”. The path toward truth, pictured in the allegory of the cave, is thus a progressive “unveiling” (the shadows of the statues, then the statues, then the shadows and reflections of *anthrôpoi*, then the *anthrôpoi* themselves, seen in the light of the sun/“good”), each step leading to a richer and more comprehensive apprehension of human beings, without getting rid of what had been perceived in the previous steps, but putting it in a different perspective and adding new insight.

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

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

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

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

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

Aretè (noun): this word is often translated as « virtue », which gives it too exclusively moral a connotation which it doesn’t have in Greek, where it has quite broad a range of uses, not only about human beings, but also about animals, plants and eventually almost anything: the *aretè* of something is what makes this thing best in what it is intended for, what constitutes its “excellence”. Thus there is a close relationship between *aretè* and *agathon* (“good”): the *aretè* is what makes what the word applies to “good (*agathon*)” to the highest possible degree for what it is meant to do, for its end/purpose. *Aretè* is the central theme of the *Meno*, which opens on a question of Meno asking Socrates if, in his opinion, human *aretè* can be taught, or results from experience, or is a gift of nature or still something else.

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

Dialegesthai (verb): verb derived from *legein* (“to talk”), also at the root of *logos* (see this word), under its middle form *legesthai*, with the adjunction of the prefix *dia-*, meaning “through, among, in the midst of, throughout, by,

between”. *Dialegesthai* means « talk with one another, dialogue ». This verb, or rather the activity it describes plays a major role in Plato’s thought since it is the *dialegesthai* which makes *logos* possible and provides the means of putting its relevance to the test.

Dialektikos (adjective; pl. *dialektikoi*): this is the adjective derived from *dialegesthai* to describe one who is versed in the art of *dialegesthai*, the ability to use *logos* within the framework of *dialogos* (“dialogue”) in an efficient way making it possible to reach truth without being trapped by words and the tricks of rhetoric.

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

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

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

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

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

Dunamis (noun; pl. *dunameis*): substantive derived from the verb *dunasthai* meaning “to be able to”. The usual meaning is “power, capacity, capability”. Aristotle uses this word in the sense of “potentiality” in opposition to “actuality”, for which he uses the word *energeia*, formed on the word *ergon* (“work, deed, action”) by adjunction of the prefix *en-* (“in, within”), which designates the quality (ending *-ia*) of what is “in deed” as opposed to only “potential”. This meaning is already present in Plato, for instance when, at *Sophist*, 247e4, he defines *ta onta* (“beings”) as being nothing more than *dunamis*: what he means by this is that, of whatever is said to “be”, that is, of any “being”, we have yet said nothing so long as we don’t add *what it is (to ti esti)*, its “beingness (*ousia*, see this word)”, so that it is only “potentially” something, waiting for a predicative expression which will qualify it. In other word as a “being (*on*)” without further qualification, as the “subject” of a phrase of the form “*x is a*”, as this *x*, it is nothing specific yet so long as an *a* has not been specified, it is yet only “potentially” an *a*.

At *Republic* V, 477c1-d6, Socrates explains that, to him, a *dunamis* is characterized by what it acts upon (*eph’ hōi esti*, literally “on what it is”) and what it accomplishes (*ho apergazetai*), mentioning sight and hearing as examples of *dunameis*. It is interesting to relate the words *pragma* (see this word), *dunamis* and *pathēma* (see this word): a *pragma* is what possesses a *dunamis* allowing it to cause a *pathēma* in something else, that is, to act (*prattein*, at the root of *pragma*) in a way which “affects” (*paschein*, at the root of *pathēma*) something else. But the same *pragma* may possess several *dunameis* affecting different things, for instance a *dunamis* affecting sight, another affecting hearing, and so on, and besides, the affection produced by the same *pragma* may differ from one to another: for instance, one *psuchē* (“soul”) affected by an image presented to it by sight may think that what it sees is all there is to know about the *pragma* of which it is only an image, while another *psuchē* understands that what it sees is only an image; in such case the *pathēma* is different from the one to the other, and thus also the *dunamis* causing it (this is what the analogy of the line at the end of book VI of the *Republic* is all about).

Eidos (noun; pl. *eidē*): a word derived from a root meaning « to see », which is almost identical to the present aorist *eidon* (“I see” or “I saw”) of the verb *horan* (“to see”). Thus the *eidos* is originally what is there to be seen, the “appearance”. From this primary meaning, the word takes the sense of “species” (all the things having the same outward general appearance), and eventually of “kind”, or “form” (the “appearance” limited to its outward boundaries). For Plato, the *eidos* is what is common to all the things having the same name (*Republic* X, 596a6-7), whether it be a physical being or an abstract concept. In the analogy of the line, in book VI of the *Republic*, he has Socrates use the expression *horōmenon eidos* (“visible appearance”, 510d5) and a few lines later, the expression *noēton eidos* (“intelligible appearance”, 511a3). What must be properly understood is that, in either case, an *eidos* is only an “appearance”, that is, a perception conditioned by the power and limits of what allows it to be perceived, whether one of the sense organs or intelligence, about which nothing allows us to assume that it reveals all there is about what it is an *eidos* of. If nonetheless these *eidē* have an « objective » reality, the reason is that they should not be understood as what a given individual perceives through organs of perception having their own defects and limits (for instance color-blind or short-sighted for sight, narrow-minded for intelligence), but as what the nature of the involved organ allows the perception of when it is at its highest degree of perfection. To say it differently, the visible *eidos* is what is *visible (horaton)* by human eyes in absolute terms, not what is *seen (horōmenon)* by specific human eyes; the intelligible *eidos* is what is intelligible (*noēton*) by the human mind (*nous*) in absolute terms, not what is actually understood (*nooumenon*) by a specific individual. Thus, there is continuity of meaning from the sensible to the intelligible and this is the reason why Plato may use the same word in both cases. Indeed, it is to make us understand this continuity that he takes the risk of using the same word in both cases.

Eikasia (noun): “representation, comparison, conjecture”; substantive derived from the verb *eoikenai* meaning “to be/look like, seem” through the verb *eikazein*, “to represent by an image or likeness, form a conjecture”. This is the name Socrates gives to the *pathēma* (see this word) associated with the first segment of the visible in the analogy of the line at the end of book VI of the *Republic*, the one where we stay prisoner of the images provided by sight without realizing they are always only images. Thus, *eikasia* in this sense is the state, the quality (ending with *-ia*), of who lives in a world of images (*eikones* see next entry) taking them for reality, who develops a representation of the world around based on what is only images, without seeking more than what sight captures; it is, in the language of the allegory of the cave, the prisoner taking the shadows of the statues for “the true (*to alēthes*)” (*Republic* VII, 515c1-2).

Eikôn (noun; pl. *eikones*): “image, likeness”. Like the previous one, this word is derived from the verb *eoikenai*, which means that it stresses the idea of likeness, not solely visual. This is the concept Socrates uses in the analogy of the line, at the end of book VI of the *Republic*, to differentiate the two segments of the visible, giving as examples of *eikones* shadows and reflections in bodies of water or other reflecting surfaces. But the reading in parallel of the analogy of the line and the allegory of the cave shows that what takes the place of reflections in the allegory inside the cave, image of the visible/sensible world, is the echo of the voice of the bearers of statues, that is, audible “reflections”, which nonetheless are sorts of *eikones* of those who utter these words, it that they give a non-visual “image” of them.

Einai (verb; present part. masc. *ôn*, fem. *ousa*, neuter *on*, neuter pl. *onta*): “to be”. For Plato, this word is only a function word linking a subject (an *on* (“being”)) and a predicative expression (a “beingness (*ousia*)”, a “what it is (*ti esti*)”). When Plato uses this verb without a predicative expression, the context should always be used to determine which one(s) are implied and should be assumed. Thus, if he speaks of “being” in the intelligible realm, it implies being *intelligible*, while if it is in the visible realm, it implies being *visible*. And when “to be (*einai*)” is opposed to “to become (*gignesthai*)”, it doesn’t mean that what becomes doesn’t “exist”, but that he opposes what *is* stable, immutable, everlasting, . . . to what *is* changing, moving, unstable, temporary, . . . Thus for instance when, in the parallel between good and sun toward the end of book VI of the *Republic*, Socrates says that, under the effect of the good (*to agathon*), everything which is known by us is not only known, but also gets from it *to einai te kai tèn ousian* (“being and beingness”, 509b6-8) in the same way as all which is lighted and made visible by the sun gets also from it *tèn genesin kai auxèn kai trophèn* (“becoming and growth and nourishment”, 509b2-4), obviously he doesn’t mean, when attributing *to einai* to the good, that it is the productive cause of the *material* existence of all we know, but only that it is the cause of their “being *intelligible*”, of their intelligibility, since really understanding anything is to him understand its relation to the good, in what way it may be good for us. And the *ousia* following the *einai* is precisely the specific “value” of what is under consideration with regard to the good. And, in the parallel, the *einai* on the side of the good answers the *genesin* (“becoming”) on the side of the sun, in the same way the *ousia*, that is, the specific value of what it is with regard to the good and no longer solely the fact of “being”, the *einai*, on the side of the good answers the growth resulting from nourishment, which gives each thing its specific consistency, and no longer a simple abstract and undetermined “becoming”, on the side of the sun.

Epistèmè (noun): « knowledge », rather than « science », either in opposition to *doxa* (“opinion”) or in opposition to *technè*, which refers rather to a “technical” (English word derived from *technè*) know-how. The etymology of the word suggests the idea of “standing above”, that is, of “dominating” the subject-matter, master it and have a comprehensive view of it. *Epistèmè* is also the name used by Socrates, in his reminder of the analogy of the line toward the end of book VII of the *Republic*, to replace *noèsis* as the name of the *pathèma* (see this word) associated with the second segment of the intelligible (*Republic* VII, 533e8), which tends to make *epistèmè* something which, if at all accessible to a human being, remains incommunicable and beyond words, since words would make us fall back in the first segment of the intelligible, that of *dianoia*. This is the reason why *sophia* (“wisdom”, see this word) is out of reach of human beings, who can only strive for it and be in love with it (*philosophoi*), without ever being sure of having reached it. The *Theaetetus* is a long failed attempt to come up with a definition of *epistèmè*. Failed because rather than starting from an investigation of *logos* (which will be the topic of the *Sophist*), which is the unavoidable tool of the search for *epistèmè*, the discussion raises the issue of *logos*, understood in various ways it attempts to define, only at the end, after other attempts at defining *epistèmè* have failed, trying to understand how *logos* might be something added to something else, namely opinion (*doxa*), already described as a *logos* (*Theaetetus*, 190a5), to transform it into knowledge.

Epithumia (noun; pl. *epithumiai*): “desire, passion, yearning, appetite” in all domains, not only sexual. In the analysis of the various parts of the *psuchè* (“soul”) by Socrates in book IV of the *Republic*, this word, used in the plural (*epithumiai*), describes one of its parts, also called *epithumètikon* (“desiring” part). In opposition to the “reasoning” part (*logistikon*) which is principle of unity, the desiring part is principle of multiplicity by virtue of the multiplicity of desires (hunger, thirst, sexual appetite, and so on). If the word *epithumia* may be used for all sorts of desires, including intellectual ones, in the analysis of the *psuchè*, the “desires” associated with the *epithumètikon* part are all the desires stemming from the body and the corporeal, “animal” nature of human beings.

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

Genos (noun; pl. *genè*): this word, derived from the verb *gignesthai* (“to be born, become”, see next entry) in its aorist form *genesthai*, means in its primary sense “family”, that is, a group sharing a common origin: “biological” family strictly speaking, sometimes limited to the children or to the direct descent, or, in a broader sense, all the member of a same “tribe”, “clan” or “race”, before taking analogically the sense of “class”, “sort”, “kind” or “genus”

(its Latin counterpart). Aristotle opposes the *genos* to its constituent *eidè* (translated as “species” in this case). What should be noted about these two words is that *genos* designates “things” associated together due to their common *origin* while *eidòs*, derived from a root meaning “to see”, associates “things” based on their common *appearance*. And if both have an origin in the sensible realm (“to be born” and “to see” are phenomena of the sensible world), both enlarge their meaning toward the abstract and intelligible realm.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hupotithenai (verb): it is the verb from which the previous word is derived; its primary meaning is “to put/place under”, and by extension, with the idea of “placing” something “under” (that is, before) the eyes of somebody, “to

set before (someone)” and from there “to suggest” and eventually “to assume, suppose”, from which the meaning “assumption, supposition” of *hypothesis* derives, aside from the meaning “thing placed under, base, support”.

Idea (noun; pl. *ideai*): substantive derived from the root of the aorist *idein* of the verb *horan* (“to see”), with a meaning close to that of *eidos* (see this word), that is, “appearance”, in a first time visible. *Idea* is less frequent in the dialogues than *eidos* (97 occurrences of *idea* compared to 406 occurrences of *eidos*). In some contexts at least, it seems that Plato uses *idea* to talk about *pragmata* (see this word) capable only of affecting directly our mind, with nothing sensible, perceptible by senses, associated with them, while *eidos* (see this word) is more general and refers, among other, to the intelligible “appearance” of sensible things. Thus, Plato’s Socrates talks about the *idea* of the good (*hè tou agathou idea*), never of the *eidos* of the good. On the other hand, he takes as the starting point of his considerations of the three kinds of beds (*klinè*, see this word) at book X of the *Republic*, the fact that “we are in the habit of positing some unique *eidos* for each of the many [things] upon which we impose the same name” (*Republic* X, 596a6-7), after having said in the allegory of the cave that names are given to the *shadows* by the chained prisoners, that is, to the visible appearances of material beings, which suggests that the *eidos* we associate with things having the same name is not necessarily an abstract principle of intelligibility, but starts as a mere visual appearance. On the contrary, in the analysis of the three sorts of beds which follows, it is the word *idea* which he uses to refer to what the manufacturer of beds ‘looks’ toward when manufacturing a bed, and what he has in mind in so doing is what allows the manufacturer to understand what a bed is independently of the many different external appearances, dimensions, colors, and the like which a bed may display, and thus to be potentially able to conceive a bed which would visually resemble none of the beds he might have seen earlier. On the contrary, a painter who wants to picture a bed looks at a specific bed to reproduce its visible *eidos* on his painting. This way of understanding *idea* is consistent with the meaning of its transcription into English as “idea”. In this perspective, *ideai* may be seen as a specific kind of *eidè*, totally abstract (after all, “good”, “beautiful” or “just” are names and thus imply an *eidos*, and, in the *Meno*, Socrates is looking for the *eidos* common to all the *aretai* (see this word), that is, to all the various aspects of what makes a human being “excellent”). And if Socrates, in the analogy of the line, describes the *pathèma* associated with the second segment of the intelligible as a process involving only *eidè* and not *ideai*, it is because human beings can’t restrict themselves to pure abstraction and ignore everything about sensible beings, in the middle of which they are anyway bound to live, that intelligence is given them to try to understand what is *good for them*, *human beings endowed with a material body*, and not to ruin their eyes in trying to contemplate the good itself, and that what makes the access to this stage possible is not to get rid of everything which is not pure ideas, but to think with the help of *eidè* while having gone beyond both the stage where we think that “things” are such as we see them (the prison of visible images, first segment of the visible) and the stage where we think that words allow us to know what they refer to (the prison of words-images, the first segment of the intelligible).

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

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

Krisis (noun): substantive derived from the verb *krinein*, “to separate, distinguish, sort, decide, judge”, which refers to the general idea of distinguishing, of making a choice, and may mean “choice”, “decision”, “judgment”

in a non-specifically judicial sense as well as in that specifically judicial sense. It is the word used by Hippocrates and his school to refer to the phase or phases of a disease allowing a diagnosis on the disease and the prognosis about its expected issue (recovery or death) and it is at the root of the English word “crisis”.

From this same root stems the adjective *kritikos*, “able to discern, to judge”, which is at the root of the English words “critic” and “critique”. In the *Sophist*, the Stranger from Elea conducts successively seven attempts at “defining” the “art (*technè*)” specific of the sophist through the method of successive dichotomies, which may be put in parallel with the seven tetralogies of the cycle of the dialogues, five in the domain of the acquisitive arts, one in the domain of the arts which the stranger gathers under the general qualification of *diakritikè*, and eventually one in the domain of the productive arts. In the word *diakritikè*, the prefix *dia-* (“through, in the midst of”) strengthens the idea of separation, but we are indeed in the domain of *krisis*, of discernment, of discrimination. And it is precisely on the occasion of this analysis of the art of the sophist that the stranger from Elea describes a manner of “healing” a “sick” soul (*psuchè*) suffering from the sickness proper to souls, ignorance, using a method by questions and answers (*Sophist*, 230b4-d4) which it is impossible not to recognize as the method used by the Socrates of the dialogues. And indeed, as soon as he is finished with describing it, the stranger hesitates to acknowledge this technique as being that of the sophist, even if, as he says, it resembles it “like a wolf to a dog” (231a6), which reminds us of the *Euthydemus*, where precisely, the method of Socrates is presented in parallel with that of two caricatural sophists. This discussion of the sophist as « critic » is meant to solicit the “critical” mind, the ability to discern, the judgment (*krisis*) of the reader so that he may make a distinction between the sophist and the philosopher. It suggests that the sixth step in the progression of the dialogues is the time of *krisis* and it is indeed at this rank that the *Sophist* finds its place, as central dialogue of the trilogy of the sixth tetralogy.

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

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

Noein (verb): verb of action derived from the root *nous* (see this word) meaning “to perceive by the mind (*nous*), apprehend, understand, think”; there exists several forms of this verb with prefixes, such as *dianoieisthai* (middle, see this word); *ennoein*, to have in (*en-*) the mind” or “to put in one’s own mind”, that is, “to understand”; *katanoein*, “to understand”, in which the prefix *kata-* adds a mere idea of completeness (“fully”). The *noein* as an activity of the mind is often opposed by Plato to the *horan* (“to see”), an opposition also found between the words derived from these verbs; such as the verbal adjectives *noèton* (“intelligible”, see this word) and *horaton* (“visible”, see this word).

Noèsis (noun): substantive of action derived from the verb *noein*: “thought”. This is the name Socrates gives to the *pathèma* (see this word) associated with the second segment of the intelligible in the analogy of the line at the end of book VI of the *Republic*, in opposition to *dianoia*, associated with the first segment of the intelligible. When he recalls the analogy toward the end of book VII; Socrates replaces *noèsis* by *epistèmè* to name this *pathèma* and uses *noèsis* to refer to the two *pathèmata* of the intelligible as a whole in opposition to *doxa* (“opinion”, see this word), used to refer to the two *pathèmata* of the visible as a whole.

Noèton (verbal adjective): verbal adjective of the verb *noein* (“to think” in the sense of “to make use of one’s mind, of one’s *nous*”), used to characterize what is fit to be thought as opposed to what is perceptible by the senses. For the opposition between *noèton* and *horaton* (“visible”), especially in the analogy of the line, see the entry on *horaton*.

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

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

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

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

And in the same way *einai* is the least significant verb since it may apply to absolutely everything, since, as soon as I think of anything it “is” at least a thought in my mind, and as soon as I utter a word, meaningful or not, it “is” at least a word, in the same way, the least significant predicative expression is *hen* (“one”), since to think about anything is to isolate it in our mind and thus to give it as a result a “unity”, if only conceptual, by making it *one* subject, an *on*. This is why the ravings of Parmenides in the dialogue bearing his name can lead nowhere, since they take as their starting point only these two words without specific meaning. The question about what “is” and what “is not” is meaningless. The only relevant questions are to determine whether the combinations of words we produce reflect adequately what they are supposed to refer to, which can only be determined in the end based on the efficiency of these combinations in dialogues intent on leading to an expected result in action.

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

Ousia (noun): the usual meaning of this word in the time of Socrates and Plato was “that which is one’s own, one’s substance, property (especially real estate)”. But this word is derived from *ousa*, the present participle feminine of *einai* (“to be”), with a derivation similar to that leading in English from “being” to “beingness” (the neologism I use to translate *ousia*). Already, in Latin, Cicero had done the same thing to translate *ousia* which he was reading in Plato’s dialogues, coining the neologism *essentia* (from *esse*, “to be” in Latin), which has been transcribed into English as “essence”, a word sometimes used to translate *ousia*. The problem with these translations, in Latin by *essentia* as well as in English by “essence” or “beingness” it that they don’t import the usual meaning of *ousia* in Greek, which is fundamental for Plato and must always be present in the back of the mind, even when *ousia* seems to have in the dialogues a “technical” and “metaphysical” meaning. Indeed, the word, derived from a root referring to “being” (what one is), has taken a meaning referring to “having” (what one has, what one owns), suggesting that we are what we own from a material standpoint. And it is precisely this way of thinking that Plato wants to challenge without changing vocabulary, but merely reverting to the root of the word. What makes the true “wealth”, that is, the true “good”, of human beings? Is it real estate and material wealth or something else? This idea of “value”, this reference to what is “good” in the most general sense not limited to material good, must always be kept in mind when reading this word in Plato’s dialogues. But most translations of *ousia* in English force on the reader a choice between the “material” understanding in the sphere of “having” (the usual meaning, translated by such words as “property” or “wealth”) and the “metaphysical” meaning in the sphere of “being” (“technical meaning”, usually translated by “essence” or simply “being”). This is odd since English, unlike French, has a word which has both meanings, the word “substance”, for which the Merriam-Webster Dictionary lists, among other, both the meaning of “essence” and that of “property” and the American Heritage Dictionary the meaning of “essence” and that of “material possessions; goods; wealth”. But it is probably precisely because “substance” keeps the dual meaning of *ousia* (plus others, not relevant here) that translators, who don’t realize that Plato plays with these two meanings, avoid the word to show they have understood in each case whether he uses it (exclusively in their mind) in one or the other sense!

Now, to make things still trickier, this “technical” meaning in the sphere of being is grounded in a “grammatical” sense stemming from its etymology, that of “predicative expression”, that is, the *a* of a sentence having the form *x esti a* (“*x* is *a*”) saying something, whatever it might be, that the subject *x* of the sentence, the “being (*to on*)”, “is (*esti*)”, that is, “the what it is (*to ti esti*)”, which explains the fact that, in Aristotle’s works, *ousia* and *to ti esti* are synonymous. It is that same Aristotle who, with his categories, restricted the scope of *ousia/to ti esti* to only a subset of all the predicates of the subject, those which are permanent and properly apply to it at all times, in opposition to other predicates which he precisely tries to “categorize”: “accident” (something which the subject ‘is’ only temporarily and “accidentally” and that other subjects, of the same species or of another species, might as well be), “quantity”, “position”, and so on. For Plato, this categorization is secondary compared to the main issue, which is to

identify the relation with the “good” of all the predicates relevant regarding the subject, whether temporary or permanent. The question which matters for him is not what the subject *is* (*ousia* as “being”), but what is *good* for that subject (*ousia* as “value”). Hence the importance for him of the dual meaning of the word *ousia* and its import of the idea of “value”, which explains why he prefers this word to the expression *to ti esti*, which eliminates this import.

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

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

The pair *pathèma* (“affection” in the sense of “what affects us”, positively or negatively, physically or morally) – *pragma* is important in Plato’s writings since he uses the word *pathèma* to refer globally to what he associates with each of the four segments of the line in the analogy of the line at the end of book VI of the *Republic*, and the word *pragma* in several dialogues to refer to what words, the constituent parts of *logos*, are supposed to refer to. Indeed, it is important to always keep in mind the relation of complementarity which exists between these two words each time either one is used by Plato. This is the reason why the usual translation of *pragma* by “thing” is misleading, since it erases the idea of something *active*, at least on our senses and/or our mind. Through the use of *pathèma* in the analogy of the line, both in the visible realm and in the intelligible realm, Plato wants to suggest that all our mental activity, whether directly induced by sensations or not, is the result of the “action” of something outside our mind, a *pragma*, which is not necessarily sensible, material, visible, tangible, but which must be there to explain the phenomenon of thought about it. When the stranger from Elea, in the *Sophist*, defines the “verb” (*rhèma*) as “*the [one] being a revealer regarding actions (praxessin, dative plural of praxis)*” and the “name/noun” (*onoma*) as “*the vocal sign regarding those who act (prattousi, present participle masculine or neuter dative plural of prattein in these [actions])*” (*Sophist*, 262a1-7) and adds a few lines later that a *logos* (“speech”) is necessarily a speech on something (*tinós einai logon*, 262e6) and must “*associat[e] a pragma to a praxis by means of a name/noun and a verb*” (262e13-14), he means that a *logos* has meaning only by reference to a *pragma*, that is, to something “acting”, “activating” our mind (though the senses or not), constituting a specific instance of a *praxis* (in the broadest possible sense, including passive attitudes on the part of the subject, as can be seen from his first example, “*Theaetetus sits*” (263a2)) depicted by a specific verb (*rhèma*) implying a specific subject (acting or being affected), described by a noun/name. And if, in the activity described by the *logos*, the subject may be acting or affected, the *pragma* depicted by the *logos*, which should not be limited to the “subject”, to the “thing”, but considered as including the whole of the “activity” described by the *logos*, is *always* acting on the mind of the person producing the *logos*, which justifies the use of the word *pragma* about it, and of *pathèma* about what this *pragma* produces in the mind of that person.

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

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

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

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

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

Polis (noun; plural *poleis*): “city”: refers both to a geographic entity and to a community living in such a place. A Greek *polis* in the time of Plato was not limited to the built-up area of an urban agglomeration, but included rural areas around it belonging to the citizens of that *polis* and providing it with at least part of what it needed, especially in terms of food. As an example, the *polis* of Athens included most of Attica all the way to Cape Sounion. When Plato talks about *polis*, the word should not be understood in the modern sense of “city” or “town”, but rather in a sense closer to that of “state”, of a political (a word derived from *polis*) community constituting an administrative unity with regard to neighboring “cities”, with its own government, its own constitution and laws, its army, and so on.

Politès (noun; pl. *politai*): inhabitant of the *polis*, that is, “citizen”. But not all the inhabitants were *politai*, only the free natives from the city. Thus, slaves and resident aliens, called “metics” (*metoikoi*, that is etymologically “those who have their house (*oikos*) amongst (*meta*) us”), most often originating from another Greek city, and thus speaking the same language as the citizens, were excluded from this status. Thus, for instance, Cephalus, the father of Lysias and Polemarchus (all of them historical characters), resident in Piraeus, the main harbor of Athens, in whose house the dialogue reported in the *Republic* takes place, was a “metic” native from Syracuse in Sicily, another Greek city at the time, though located in Sicily. Besides, only adult males had civic rights and thus were properly speaking *politai*, not women and children.

Politeia (noun): this word derived from *politès* has a multiplicity of meaning, some of them relative to individuals as *politai*, others relative to the community, the *polis* as a whole: it may simply mean “citizenship”, that is, the mere fact for someone to be a *politès* of one or another city; it may also refer to the body of rights and duties of a *politès*; or else, the lifestyle fitting for a *politès*; but it may also refer to the gathering of all the *politai*; or to the organization of the *polis* describing the various roles expected from its *politai*, that is, the “constitution” organizing the life of the city and its *politai*, giving to “constitution” a broader sense that that of the word nowadays, including the whole body of laws of the city; and, eventually, but only lately and probably not before Aristotle, thus not in the time of Plato, it came to designate a specific type of government of the *politai* corresponding to what is now called “republic”. *Politeia* is the Greek title of the dialogue ill-advisedly called in English *Republic*, and it is not mere chance if Plato chose this title for a dialogue focusing on what makes a good life for human beings, animals bound by nature to live in society, that is, “political” animals, for whom it is impossible to dissociate the individual from the collective since the laws of the city are made by human beings, but human beings are raised and educated by the city, its laws and system of values. It is this intrication implied by the plurality of senses of *politeia* which is lost in the translation by *Republic*. “Citizenship” would have been a better translation of this title.

Politikos (adjective): “of, for, or relating to a city and its citizens”. It is the word at the root of the English words “politic”, “politics”, “political” and “politician”. In Greek, the word could be used as a noun, with an article, to mean “politician”, which is what Plato does. The *Sophist* starts with a question of Socrates to the stranger from Elea which Theodorus brought along with him, asking him if, for his fellow citizens (the citizens of Elea, in Italy), the words *sophistès*, *philosophos* and *politikos* refer to the same person or to different persons. The *Sophist* deals with the difference between *sophistès* and *philosophos* and is followed by the *Statesman*, sometimes also called *Politicus* (*Politikos* in Greek), which deals with the *politikos*. The question of Socrates points both at the issue of the confusion between sophists and philosophers (which was responsible for the death of Socrates, taken for a sophist by most of his fellow Athenians in a time where sophists were not well-considered by most people) and at the influence of sophists on politicians of the time, whom they trained, against huge fees, to the art of public speech and the manner of being convincing with little or no care for truth, challenging religion and ancestral traditions by the teaching of materialist and relativist atheism. It also points at the proposal of Socrates in the *Republic* that *philosophoi* should rule, that is, become *politikoi*.

Pragma (noun; pl. *pragmata*): *pragma* is to the verb *prattein* (“to act, achieve, accomplish”) what *pathèma* is to the verb *paschein* (see this word). On this word and his relationship with *pathèma*, and the limits of its usual translation as “thing”, see the entry on *pathèma*.

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

Psuchè (noun; pl. *psuchai*): a word usually translated as “soul”, which is at the root of the English prefix “psycho-” found in such words as “psychology” or “psychiatry”. For Plato, the *psuchè* is primarily principle of life and movement. It is what “animates” the body (“animate” is derived from the Latin word *anima*, which is the Latin equivalent of the Greek *psuchè*). It is in a way everything which, in a human being (and more generally in any animal capable of moving by itself), is not material but is nonetheless needed to understand and explain that being. By definition, this immaterial part which is necessary to explain the experience we have of human beings, and which we somehow experience within ourselves as far as we are concerned, eludes “scientific” understanding and certainty regarding both its nature and its destiny, especially at death, even though it is what constitutes most properly the *anthrôpos*, which cannot be searched in the aggregate of matter constantly changing and always renewed by food that the perishable body is. *Anthrôpoi* cannot know for sure in this life what happens at death. The *Phaedo* doesn’t attempt to “demonstrate” the immortality of the *psuchè*, which is impossible for human reason. Indeed, if Plato’s Socrates had such a demonstration, absolutely convincing for all, he wouldn’t need to propose several of them, as he does in this dialogue. All he does is to assume the immortality of the *psuchè* as an hypothesis and then search all the arguments, none of which is binding, giving plausibility to this hypothesis, and put to the test its consistency with other data from experience and other more abstract reasoning, to end up on the avowal, minutes before drinking the hemlock, that, as far as he is concerned, he has taken the “beautiful risk” (*Phaedo*, 114d6) of building his life on this assumption and on the complementary one that the good for a human being is the good for one’s *psuchè*, even at a time where it implied for him to accept an unjust death because it was decided by his fellow citizens in respect of the laws in effect.

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

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

Sophos (adjective): “skilled in any handicraft or art”, and also “learned”, “clever, ingenious”, “wise”. The quality of the one being *sophos* is *sophia*, which goes from “skill” in any practical matter to “learning” and eventually “wisdom”. For Plato, this wisdom, which requires exhaustive knowledge, is out of reach of human beings in this life due to the inherent limitations of their nature and of *logos*, which is the tool with which they seek it. This is

the reason why human beings can at best be *philosophoi*, that is, “in love with wisdom/knowledge”, trying to approach it as close as possible for human nature and each one’s specific nature. And the first step toward this wisdom is to admit that it is out of reach but that this is no reason to despair of *logos* and fall into misology (*misologia*, “hate of *logos*”, see *Phaedo*, 89d4), which would be the worst kind of misanthropy, since *logos* is what distinguishes human beings from all other animals. If *logos* is not all-powerful, if it cannot give us access to undoubtable and demonstrable knowledge on the most important questions regarding the way of leading a good life as human beings (which justifies the “I know nothing” of Socrates), it still is the best tool at our disposal for that purpose and, in the same way it is not because sight doesn’t show us things as they are that we should refuse to trust it (*pistis*, see that word) and close our eyes forever, in the same way, it is not because our *nous* (“mind”) and the *logos* it makes possible don’t allow us to find undoubtable answers to the questions we ask ourselves that we should refuse altogether to use it and become *alogoi* (“irrational, deprived of reason”).

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

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

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

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

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

Plato : the Essentials

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

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

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