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Τάγαθόν in Plato's *Republic* and the Problem of its Transcendence

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Τάγαθόν in PLATO'S *REPUBLIC* AND THE PROBLEM OF ITS TRANSCENDENCE

ABSTRACT. The article clarifies the notion of the Good (τάγαθόν) in Plato's *Republic* and the problem of its transcendence, while also introducing a new systematics of its multiple interpretations. There are two seemingly contradictory sets of passages concerning the relation of τάγαθόν to being and knowledge: the first set is representing τάγαθόν as part of being and the intelligible realm, while the second set is depicting it as something transcending being and the realm of the intelligible. The analogy of the sun and the reconstruction of omitted counterparts of the analogy are presented as crucial to the problem of the transcendence of τάγαθόν, especially so is the ἐπέκεινα passage at 509b. Tracing the logic and history of interpreting 509b from the Early Academy to contemporary scholarship helps to take a comprehensive look at the problem from different angles. Two possible meanings of οὐσία at 509b and three possible meanings of the article preceding οὐσία gives us six special classes of interpretations; apart from these six, there are several general classes to be considered. However, the author's conclusion is that the most convenient way to integrate the scattered fragments of what is said about τάγαθόν in Plato's *Republic* into a holistic picture is to use hints from the ἄγραφα δόγματα. Identifying Plato's τάγαθόν with τὸ ἔν reconciles the transcendence and immanence of τάγαθόν.

KEYWORDS: Plato, the *Republic*, the good, *epekeina*, *ousia*, transcendence.

§ 1. Quest for the Good (τάγαθόν) and seemingly contradictory sets of passages about it

The phrase “I understand this no more than τάγαθόν of Plato” became proverbial for expressing an astounding incomprehensibility¹. Indeed, the account of τάγαθόν in the *Republic* comprises one of the greatest enigmas in the writings of Plato. We shall start with one key aspect

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¹ Cf. Adam 1963: 2.50, making a note *ad R.* 505a: “τὸ Πλάτωνος ἀγαθόν was in

of this enigma: the relation of τᾶγαθόν to being and knowledge. There are two sets of passages regarding this relation: set I is characterizing τᾶγαθόν as part of being and the intelligible realm, i.e. “immanent” to it, while set II is characterizing τᾶγαθόν as “transcending”, going beyond both being and the realm of the intelligible.

Apart from the passages which seem to straightforwardly describe τᾶγαθόν as part of the intelligible realm, there is yet another group of passages characterizing τᾶγαθόν as knowable (after all, the whole discussion of τᾶγαθόν is presented in the context of the education of the Guardians). Given the principle formulated by the argument at *R.* 476e–479e that only “what is” (ὄν) is knowable and what is not (μὴ ὄν) cannot be known at all, the assertion of knowability of τᾶγαθόν is equivalent to the assertion that τᾶγαθόν is ὄν (cf. *Sph.* 262e). The passages making such assertions I shall mark as I*, considering them as a special subset of set I. Now we turn to systematic overview and evaluation of what is said of τᾶγαθόν in book IV of the *Republic* (the classification of passages under certain groups will be provided in parentheses).

The way Socrates defined virtues in book IV (by means of the tripartite division of soul) was considered “less than exact” (*R.* 504b). A Guardian cannot be satisfied with this imperfect measure of investigation, so a “longer road” (504c) is required, in the course of which he “will have reached the end of the greatest and the most appropriate subject” (τοῦ μεγίστου τε καὶ μάλιστα προσήκοντος μαθήματος ἐπὶ τέλος, 509d, subset I*), i.e. the idea of τᾶγαθόν (ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα, 505a), which will also enable him for the most perfect treatment of virtues (504d) — as opposed to a mere sketch given in book IV. Although Adeimantus wonders, there is actually no wonder that the idea of τᾶγαθόν is “yet more important than justice and the other virtues we discussed”, for it is by virtue of the idea of τᾶγαθόν that “just things and the others become useful and beneficial [i.e. good]” (ἢ δὲ καὶ δίκαια

antiquity a proverb for any dark or obscure saying: see *Amphis* ap. D.L. 3.27 ἦτρον οἶδα τοῦτ’ ἐγώ, | ὦ δέσποτ’, ἢ τὸ Πλάτωνος ἀγαθόν. (Another allusion occurs in *Alexis* ap. *Athen.* 8, 354d). Aristoxenus’ famous account of Plato’s lecture on τᾶγαθόν in his *Elementa Harmonica* (2.30–31) is characteristic as well: listeners were outraged by the incomprehensibility of Plato’s account of τᾶγαθόν.

καὶ τᾶλλα προσχρησάμενα χρήσιμα καὶ ὠφέλιμα γίγνεται, 505a, note *dativus instrumentalis*, perhaps of participation or κοινωνία²). The very expression ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα and Form-like description of its function suggests that the idea of τάγαθόν is a Form³, perhaps the highest Form. Note also that at 507b Socrates introduces the idea of τάγαθόν in line with other ideas: for a plurality of things called by the same name (for example, good or beautiful), we postulate a single Form (ιδέαν μίαν), say τάγαθόν itself or the beautiful itself (αὐτὸ δὴ καλὸν καὶ αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν). Hence, from this passage, it seems obvious that τάγαθόν itself is a Form; in this case, indeed, it is a being and an οὐσία. This appears to be in direct contradiction with the claim at 509b that τάγαθόν itself is not οὐσία. However, there are interpretative paths to avoid the contradiction. One might hypothesize that here, at 507b, Plato offers only provisional account, departing from what is already known, i.e. the theory of Forms, to what is not yet known, i.e. a theory of the idea of τάγαθόν. So he first shows that what is not yet known (the idea of τάγαθόν) is similar to what is already known (the theory of Forms). And what is similar is a one-over-many principle: both Forms and τάγαθόν itself are one-over-many, and in this respect they are juxtaposed. Yet a juxtaposition in this one respect does not mean that they belong to the same class of entities. This might mean only their similarity in terms of being “one-over-many”, while this “many” differs: an ordinary Form is one over many sensibles, while the idea of τάγαθόν is one over many (in fact all) Forms, the Form of Forms (“Formness” itself). In this case, of course, the idea of τάγαθόν would be transcendent to Forms in the same way as an ordinary Form is transcendent to sensibles. Yet they are similar in being “one-over-many”, and thus are called by the same name of ἰδέα and provisionally juxtaposed at 507b. However, there is yet another interpretative path to avoid contradiction: to accept that the idea of τάγαθόν belongs to the same class of entities as ordinary Forms, and take the claim that it is οὐκ οὐσία to mean that it is not “the

² See Adam 1963: 2.51, *ad loc.*

³ Cf. passages where Plato refers to τάγαθόν as a Form, as enumerated in Yount 2014: 147, n. 2: *Cra.* 439cd; *Hp.Ma.* 287b–d; *Phd.* 65d, 75d, 76d–77a, 100b; *R.* 5, 476a; 6, 505ab, 506d–507c; 7, 517b–518a, 532a–534c; *Prm.* 130b, 134c, 135cd; *Tht.* 186a; *Phlb.* 15a.

οὐσία” (i.e. the Being), while it well might be “*an* οὐσία” (i.e. a being) — to which interpretation we shall return later.

Multiple expressions of the knowability of the idea of τὰγαθόν (subset I*) also suggest that it is a being, ὄν. If we do not know the idea of τὰγαθόν, “even the fullest possible knowledge of other things is of no benefit to us” (εἰ δὲ μὴ ἴσμεν, ἄνευ δὲ ταύτης εἰ ὅτι μάλιστα τᾶλλα ἐπιστάμεθα, οἴσθ’ ὅτι οὐδὲν ἡμῖν ὄφελος, 505a). No one will have adequate knowledge of just and fine things unless one knows the idea of τὰγαθόν, in virtue of which they are good (δίκαιά τε καὶ καλὰ ... ὅπη ποτὲ ἀγαθὰ ἐστίν, 506a); and, indeed, one cannot be a proper Guardian without this knowledge (ibid.). Only in the case when the constitution of the State is overseen by the Guardian who knows these things it would be perfectly ordered (506b). This group of passages gives us a significant weight to put on the scale of set I.

§ II. *The analogy of the sun*

Here our reading comes to the famous analogy of the sun, which has weights to put on both scales. However, the passages of set II are to be found almost exclusively here. As we shall see, set II is tiny compared to set I in terms of quantity in the whole account of the *Republic*. Yet, paradoxically enough, it is immensely more influential. In fact, the tiny set II has almost completely overshadowed the enormous set I for roughly two thousand years.

The analogy of the sun goes as follows: “what the latter [i.e. τὰγαθόν] is in the intelligible realm in relation to intellection and intelligibles, the former [i.e. the sun] is in the visible realm in relation to vision and visibles” (ὅτιπερ αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ νοητῷ τόπῳ πρὸς τε νοῦν καὶ τὰ νοούμενα, τοῦτο τοῦτον ἐν τῷ ὁρατῷ πρὸς τε ὄψιν καὶ τὰ ὀρώμενα, 508bc). The analogy is based on the similarity of functions of τὰγαθόν and the sun. Plato does not always explicitly utter what is the case on both sides of the analogy. Sometimes he only says what is the case with the sun and vision, leaving for us to guess what is the parallel on the other side. I shall fill in such gaps in [square parentheses]. However, this might cause a number of issues, since we do not know exactly

how Plato conceived of relations between sun and its light, eye and its vision, object and its colors⁴. Yet, I hope, there is a way to find out.

The first base of the analogy is a similarity in the epistemological functions of the sun and *τάγαθόν*.

1. For vision it is not sufficient there to be an eye and an object before it: there is a need for a third thing, light (*γένος τρίτον*, 507e), a yoke (*ζυγόν*) or medium, which unites the power of sight to see and the power of the object to be seen (*τοῦ ὁρᾶν αἴσθησις καὶ ἡ τοῦ ὁρᾶσθαι δύναμις*, 507e–508a) in actual seeing. [By analogy, for intellection it is not sufficient there to be an intellect and an intelligible object: there is a need for a third thing, some intellectual medium, a yoke, which unites the power of intellect to know and the power of the intelligible to be known in actual knowledge. If Plato really means for us to fill the gap this way, then we should think of an intellectual analogue of light, a medium derivative from *τάγαθόν* but not identical to it⁵.]

2. The source of this third thing, i.e. light, is the divinity (*θεός*) – the sun (*ἥλιος*, 508a). [By analogy, the source of the intellectual medium is *θεός* as well.] The sun is not identical with the eye or sight (*οὐκ ἔστιν ἥλιος ἢ ὄψις οὔτε αὐτὴ οὔτ' ἐν ᾧ ἐγγίγνεται, ὃ δὴ καλοῦμεν ὄμμα*, 508ab), yet the eye is the most sunlike (*ἡλιοειδέστατόν*), receiving its power from the sun as an influx (*τὴν δύναμιν ἣν ἔχει ἐκ τούτου ταμειουμένην ὥσπερ ἐπίρρυτον κέκτηται*, 508b). [By analogy, *τάγαθόν* is not identical with mind or intellection, yet mind is the most goodlike, and receiving its power from *τάγαθόν* as an influx (the influx being a metaphor of participation).]

3. Socrates further elaborates the analogy, and here comes a difficult passage starting from 508c. The eye sees well when it is turned on objects “whose colors are illuminated by the light of day” (*ὧν ἂν τὰς χροῶς τὸ ἡμερινὸν φῶς ἐπέχη*, 508c), and “on which the sun shines” (*ὧν ὃ ἥλιος καταλάμπει*, 508d). By analogy, when the soul or mind

⁴ Although the *Timaeus* gives us a hint on Plato's theory of vision, cf. *Ti.* 45b.

⁵ It would be conceivable to think that Plato identifies the sun with its light and *τάγαθόν* with this intellectual medium, but he himself denies this identity at 509a: *φῶς τε καὶ ὄψιν ἡλιοειδῆ ... ἥλιον δ' οὐκ*. So, if the analogy is strict in each detail mentioned by Plato, we imagine some derivative from the *τάγαθόν* medium, an intellectual analogue of light.

“focuses on something that is *illuminated both by truth and what is* (οὗ καταλάμπει ἀλήθειά τε καὶ τὸ ὄν), it understands, knows, and manifestly possesses understanding”.

Matthias Baltes claims that all statements in 508d1–6 “are completely parallel, especially the two relative clauses ὧν ὁ ἥλιος καταλάμπει and οὗ καταλάμπει ἀλήθειά τε καὶ τὸ ὄν. This means that, since the sun is the analogue of the idea of the Good, the idea of the Good is ἀλήθειά τε καὶ τὸ ὄν (‘truth and being’)”⁶. If Baltes is right and Plato refers to the idea of τὰγαθόν as τὸ ὄν, being or “what is”, this would be one of the strongest passages of group I. However, as we have seen, in 508c the relative clause was about illumination by the light of day (τὸ ἡμερινὸν φῶς), i.e. by some medium derivative from the sun, which is light. Plato sometimes refers to the illumination by the sun, naturally presupposing the illumination by a medium derivative from the sun, which is light. So the expression ἀλήθειά τε καὶ τὸ ὄν stands in parallel to τὸ ἡμερινὸν φῶς, signifying an intellectual medium⁷ derivative from τὰγαθόν, an intellectual analogue of the light (which is not τὰγαθόν, as sunlight is not the sun). So far Baltes’s claim seems to be unwarranted.

4. The idea of τὰγαθόν, Socrates further elaborates, “gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower” (τὴν ἀλήθειαν παρέχον τοῖς γινωσκομένοις καὶ τῷ γινώσκοντι τὴν δύναμιν ἀποδιδόν, 508e). Being the cause of knowledge and truth (αἰτίαν δ’ ἐπιστήμης οὖσαν καὶ ἀληθείας), it is yet “other than these and superior in beauty” (ἄλλο καὶ κάλλιον ἔτι τούτων). Here τὰγαθόν is the cause of truth and superior to it, not the truth, as Baltes suggests⁸.

I want to emphasize the identification of sight (“the most sunlike”) with influx (ἐπίρρυτον, 508b) from the sun [by analogy, intellection must be an influx of τὰγαθόν and the most goodlike]. At 509a, intellection and truth are called goodlike and caused by τὰγαθόν [being an influx from it, by analogy].

⁶ Baltes 1999: 356.

⁷ Cf. Seel 2007: 170.

⁸ Baltes 1999: 357–358. However, Baltes defends his position further by introducing two different senses in which Socrates speaks of ἀλήθεια here: first is the ἀλήθεια *per se*, second is an ἀλήθεια provided to things by the ἀλήθεια *per se*.

The issue here is no less than the eternal philosophical question of the relation between subject (eye and intellect in the analogy) and object (visibles and intelligibles things in the analogy). And Plato suggests the actual unity of their powers (507e–508a, see above). What is obvious, is that insofar as we are thinking and perceiving at a given moment, this actual unity is already a fact. Any piece of reality is such a unity, insofar as reality is always something thinkable, perceivable, imaginable. It is only in artificial rough scheme that we can separate a subject from an object and talk of some third yoke which unites them. For reality is always an actual unity of subject and object. This explains why Plato does not keep the terms of his analogy (light-vision-color on the side of the sun, truth-understanding-intelligibility on the side of *τάγαθόν*) strictly separate. Light, vision and color are just one actually united influx from the sun; if light is referred to as *ζυγόν* (yoke), it is *ζυγόν* in the sense of a connected pair (two bulls under one yoke taken as a whole), not just the yoke itself. Truth, understanding and intelligibility are just one actually united influx from *τάγαθόν*, which we call reality. And this is exactly what Plato explicitly says next: *τάγαθόν* is the ontological source of reality (*τὸ ὄν*).

Here we come to the second base of the analogy: the similarity in the ontological functions between the sun and *τάγαθόν*. The sun “not only gives visible things the power to be seen but also provides for their coming-to-be, growth, and nourishment — although it is not the coming-to-be itself” (*τὸν ἥλιον τοῖς ὀρωμένοις οὐ μόνον οἶμαι τὴν τοῦ ὀρᾶσθαι δύναμιν παρέχειν φήσεις, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν γένεσιν καὶ αὐξὴν καὶ τροφήν, οὐ γένεσιν αὐτὸν ὄντα*, 509b). By analogy, *τάγαθόν* provides the existence and essence (*τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν*) to the intelligibles, although *τάγαθόν* is not *οὐσία*, but something yet beyond *οὐσία*, superior to it in rank and power (I shall refer to it as the “*ἐπέκεινα* clause”: *ἀλλ’ ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος*, 509b).

Here we have the most problematic passage, seemingly an assertion of the transcendence of *τάγαθόν*, the absolute, over being. As Jens Halfwassen puts it, “thereby the transcendence of the absolute beyond

being is expressed decisively for the first time in the history of philosophy⁹. But this is apparently in contradiction with the passages of group I. Thus, we have several interpretative options: to explain away or qualify or ignore I and embrace II, in which case we have a meta-ontological interpretation (μοι: τὰγαθόν is other than being), or to explain away or qualify II and embrace I, in which case our interpretation is ontological (οι: τὰγαθόν is being), or else to find a way to reconcile sets I and II without weakening or ignoring either of them. At this point we encounter one of the most difficult issues in Platonic studies, and we shall tackle it substantially and meticulously. It is hardly possible to find the right way in such a vast sea of interpretative possibilities without having a map. For this reason, a systematic overview of both logically possible and historically testified interpretative decisions concerning this issue shall precede any further conjectures.

§ III. Logic and history of interpreting R. 509b

First and foremost, what is the meaning of οὐσία¹⁰? The phrase τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν can give us a clue. There are several types of interpretations of the phrase, dependent on the answers to the following two questions. First, whether οὐσία and τὸ εἶναι are two words for the same thing (a hendiadys¹¹, an exegetic καί¹²), “existence-and-being”, or οὐσία and τὸ εἶναι are two distinct terms, in which case τὰγαθόν provides “both existence and essence” to the intelligibles. Generally, “τὰγαθόν is not οὐσία but superior to it” in the first case would mean that τὰγαθόν is not being and existence, but beyond it (μοι¹³), in the

⁹ Halfwassen 1992: 221.

¹⁰ Plato’s usage of this word is polysemic. The philosophical usage includes a designation of the intelligible realm, in contrast to the world of becoming, γένεσις. As Hitchcock 1985: 86, n. 28 puts it, οὐσία may designate either the realm of the intelligible as a whole (485b2, 486a9, 523a3, 524e1, 525b5, 525c6, 526c6, 526e6–7, 534a3–4) or the being which the intelligibles enjoy (509b8–9, 585b12, c7, 12, and perhaps *Hp. Ma.* 301e4). Οὐσία can also designate either being in general of a particular thing or its essence, as opposed to its pathos or attribute, see *ibid.*, n. 29.

¹¹ Hitchcock 1985: 69; Gerson 2003: 174, n. 40.

¹² Fine 2003: 96, n. 19

¹³ There are exceptions, e.g., Hitchcock 1985, for whom τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν is

second case *τάγαθόν* is merely not an essence and beyond it, but not necessarily beyond being and existence (OI). The second question concerns the function of the article¹⁴ preceding *οὐσία*, whether it is:

- α. the universal quantifier: *τάγαθόν* is not an *οὐσία* at all;
- β. the limiting quantifier: *τάγαθόν* is not the *οὐσία* in a particular sense¹⁵, but in some (e.g., higher) sense it is an *οὐσία*.
- γ. the unique quantifier (the utmost case of the limiting quantifier), in which case *οὐσία* means the being (or essence) *per se*: *τάγαθόν* is not the *οὐσία* in a sense of merely non-identity with the being itself (the Form of being), in which case it still can be a being (let's call this type of interpretation a "non-identity" interpretation).

It is convenient to represent the possible types of interpretations engendered by the two decisions in the form of a chart, assigning a number for each type of interpretation for future reference:

	οὐσία = being	οὐσία = essence
α.	S1: <i>τάγαθόν</i> is not a being at all, but beyond being (MOI).	S4: <i>τάγαθόν</i> is not an essence at all but beyond essence (OI, as represented in G. Seel).
β.	S2: <i>τάγαθόν</i> is not a being in some (ordinary) sense, but is a being in another (say, the highest) sense. Attested in J.Adam, G. Reale, etc. (This interpretation is in a sense MOI, in a sense OI, which might be confusing.)	S5: <i>τάγαθόν</i> is not an essence in some (ordinary) sense, but is an essence in another (say, the highest) sense. (OI by means of limitation of the account of <i>οὐσία</i> in <i>R.</i> 509b, as in M. Baltes.)
γ.	S3: <i>τάγαθόν</i> is not the being <i>per se</i> , but beyond the being <i>per se</i> and superior to it. (This might be interpreted either in MOI or in OI way, in the latter case incorrectly.)	S6: <i>τάγαθόν</i> is not the essence <i>per se</i> , but beyond the essence <i>per se</i> and superior to it. The essence <i>per se</i> might mean the world of Forms as a whole, as in W. Beierwaltes.

Chart 1: Logical possibilities of interpreting *R.* 509b.

a hendiadys designating the ontological status of Forms (which is being), yet *τάγαθόν* is superior to it in a qualified sense — it is not transcendent to being. "Plato does not mean that the good is beyond being in the sense that it is a principle which transcends the realm of what exists, but only that it is a Form more dignified and more powerful than being, which he presumably thinks of here as a Form (as he does at 478e1–2)" (Hitchcock 1985: 90, n. 56).

¹⁴ Cf. Shields 2011: 290.

¹⁵ As in Adam 1963: 2.62, *ad* 509b: "the Good is not *οὐσία* in the sense in which the Ideas are *οὐσία*; but in a higher sense it is the only true *οὐσία*"; cf. Baltes 1999. More on this below.

These are what I call special strategies of interpreting the ἐπέκεινα clause, reflective of and dependent upon the semantics of the term οὐσία and its quantification. Besides, there exist what I call general strategies, which do not depend on the analysis of the usage of οὐσία. Some of them depend on contextual considerations of the ἐπέκεινα clause, and some on the very broad assumptions concerning Plato's works. Since we are about to start our historical overview of the interpretative decisions of the ἐπέκεινα problem, our S₁–S₆ taxonomy needs to be broadened by two more categories: 1. interpretations which do not depend on textual exegesis (such as interpretations of Plato's close students, who might have relied on the oral teachings of Plato himself, or interpretations of later Platonists, whose choice usually depended on tradition or their own worldview, neglecting textual exegesis); 2. interpretations more or less unreflective of textual problematics, such as those which do not remark on the issue of an apparent conflict between groups I and II, simply overlooking it. The latter is characteristic of the XIX century scholarship. Therefore, our historical account proceeds from non-textual interpretations of the ancients to those of the XIX century scholars, remaining unreflective of the apparent contradictions, then to general strategies of the XX century, and finally to special strategies S₁–S₆ of contemporary scholarship.

*§ IV. The ἐπέκεινα problem from Antiquity to the XIX century:
predominance of meta-ontological interpretation (MOI)*

We shall start from the opinions and testimonies of those close to Plato, such as of his nephew Speusippus and Aristotle, for they had an immediate access to Plato's teachings. However, there is much that is controversial about this path, especially given the poor state of preservation of primary sources. Yet even Baltes, one of the most critical to MOI scholars, still is certain that “in the Old Academy there existed speculations about the One and the Good beyond being. However, it is completely uncertain whether there had been any references to Plato's *Republic* in this connection”¹⁶. That might be the case, but cannot be

¹⁶ Baltes 1999: 352.

proved, says Baltes. His position here is pretty weak, for if such a highly specific theme as beyond-beingness of the first principle was ever debated, the 509b of the *Republic* simply could not have been overlooked and not discussed by the students of Plato.

There are three testimonies to the point that Speusippus considered the first principle as transcendent to being, found in Aristotle (*Metaph.* 14.5, 1092a), Iamblichus (*Comm. math.* 4), and Proclus (*In Prm.* 1–5). But even if Speusippus had an idea of beyond-beingness, it's hard to suppose that it was Speusippus himself who first invented the idea and not Plato, given the *R.* 509b passage. Anyway, this fact shall have weight when it comes to interpreting Plato's own view.

However, when it comes to the Middle Platonism, the ontological interpretation is not unusual. We encounter it in Plutarch, in Iustinus' testimonies, Numenius, etc.¹⁷ Perhaps, OI was not that prevalent as Baltes would have it; at any rate, the views of people who lived centuries after Plato are not of a great relevance for the present discussion, so I shall not go into details. The same could have been said about the Neoplatonists, if it were not for the fact that under the influence of Plotinus MOI became an article of faith for nearly two thousand years. The Plotinian type of interpretation of 509b dominated at least until the second half of the xx century, and it still determines many new readers of Plato to prefer MOI , consciously or unconsciously.

Since, as we have said, the period from Plotinus up to the modern scholarship produced no major debates on *R.* 509b, on account of its adhering to MOI and ignoring group I passages, we shall immediately jump to the origins of modern scholarship in the xix century.

One of the grounding xix century works specially dedicated to the study of the idea of $\tau\acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\theta\acute{\omicron}\nu$ in Plato was Karl Stumpf's dissertation *Das Verhaltnis des platonischen Gottes zur Idee des Guten*. It still sticks to MOI without problematizing it or noticing contradictory passages¹⁸.

A comment of Benjamin Jowett and Lewis Campbell to *R.* 509b in their 1894 edition belongs to the same class: "Referring to the history

¹⁷ More on this in Baltes 1999: 361ff.

¹⁸ Stumpf 1869: 63. Cf. Krohn 1876: 146.

of philosophy we may translate this [i.e. the ἐπέκεινα passage]: ‘The idea of good reaches a step beyond the Eleatic being’¹⁹.

Pretty much the same can be said about Paul Shorey’s works and translations, fundamental for Anglophone Plato studies. Shorey takes the meta-ontological interpretation for granted, without any discussion of the issue. So he reads Plato’s ἐπέκεινα passage meta-ontologically: τὰγαθόν “is not essence or existence, but something above or beyond existence, operating as its cause”²⁰; thus “the Neo-Platonists followed the master in assigning the Good a place beyond Being”²¹. Difficulties of such a reading remain unreflected. Shorey sides τὰγαθόν with other forms, unreflective of how a Form can be not a being or an essence. His rendering of Plato’s words in his 1895 paper goes in the same way: “the Idea of Good, though the wellspring of knowledge and Being, is not Being but something beyond and above it in dignity and power”²². All these flaws are characteristic of scholarly treatment of τὰγαθόν in the XIX century.

§ V. Contemporary meta-ontological interpretations

The meta-ontological interpretation becomes much more elaborate and reflective in the XX century scholarship²³. However, not so many scholars have attempted to defend it from the accusation of contradicting the passages of group I. We shall turn to those who have.

¹⁹ Jowett, Campbell 1894: 3.307.

²⁰ Shorey 1895: 225.

²¹ Ibid.: 188.

²² Ibid.: 197.

²³ Hartmann 1909: 264 f.; Whitby 1909: 121; Ferguson 1921: 134–136; 1963: 193; Jessop 1930: 47; Gadamer 1931: 61; 1986: 20, 27, 89; Festugière 1935: 202; Fuller 1912: 286; Bréhier 1958: 134; Schulz 1960: 274; Berger 1961: 111 f.; Rist 1964: 53–54; Sinaiko 1965: 142; Friedländer 1969: 62–63; de Vogel 1969: 229; 1970: 184, 187; 1986: 15; Strycker 1970: 455; Findlay 1978: 28; 1974: 184; Blumenthal 1993: 3; Sells 1994: 6; O’Meara 1993: 52; Reale 1997: 203; Voegelin 2000: 167; Bowe 2003: 16–19; Desjardins 2004: 119, 229; Reeve 2003: 43; Yount 2014: 15; Ferber 2015. Add to these the profound and exquisite works of the Tübingen school, such as those of H.J. Krämer, K. Gaiser, Th.A. Szlezák, J. Halfwassen, V. Hölsle. See Nikulin 2012 for English translations of some of these works, and the bibliography section of his work for comprehensive lists.

Eric Perl, following C.J. de Vogel, suggests that “the brightest of being” (τοῦ ὄντος τὸ φανότατον) of *R.* 518c and “the happiest of being” (τὸ εὐδαιμονέστατον τοῦ ὄντος) of 526e must be understood not as a superlative partitive expression, “a being happiest and brightest among other beings” (for being here is in the singular: τοῦ ὄντος), but as a comparative ablative one, “that which is brighter or happier than (any and every) being”²⁴. Perl continues:

Likewise, the third phrase [“the best in beings”, τοῦ ἀρίστου ἐν τοῖς οὐσί, *R.* 532c] need not mean ‘the best among beings’ but can mean rather ‘that which, in beings, is best’, i.e., that in virtue of which beings are good, just as, at *Philebus* 64c5–6, the good is referred to as what is “most precious” in a mixture as that which makes the whole mixture “dear”²⁵.

This kind of interpretation takes the οὐσία at 509b to be a being; τάγαθόν, consequently, is not a being in any sense whatever (including the sense that it is not the being *per se*, not the Form of being). This is the S₁ type interpretation according to our chart above. The problem with this type is that the transcendence of τάγαθόν is explicitly defended from only some of group I passages, but not from all, especially not from I*-passages. Whether the latter task can be performed persuasively or not is an open question, and the problematical character of S₁ type interpretation still pertains.

Another defense of μοι against group I passages would be “not in the same sense” defense, as it is found in Giovanni Reale’s *Toward a New Interpretation of Plato*:

This [the ἐπέκεινα passage] is simply a different way of designating the good as the source of Being. In the end, the claim that the Good (One) is above Being means that it is its supreme source or origin. Thus, to speak of the brightest of beings or of Being itself is to use the term “Being” in a prototypical sense, and hence in a sense different from its common use²⁶.

²⁴ Perl 2014: 60; cf. de Vogel 1970: 185, and Smyth’s *Greek Grammar* (Smyth 1956: 334, § 1434.

²⁵ Perl 2014: 60.

²⁶ Reale 1997: 2008.

In other words, when Plato says that τᾶγαθόν is *above* being he means being in the ordinary sense, a being, and when Plato says that τᾶγαθόν is being he means being in the prototypical sense, as “what causes being”. Even if the being is understood as the Form of being, it might be said to be beyond (any particular) being. Reale perhaps envisages being in the prototypical sense as even higher than the Form of being and any other Form, as their cause. What is important here is that οὐσία at 509b is taken to mean being (or Being) in some sense (ordinary), but not in the other (prototypical). This is clearly a S2 type interpretation according to our chart.

S3 type is trickier. It takes οὐσία as the being itself, the Form of being, and claims that τᾶγαθόν is not the being (non-identity claim) but superior to it. However, this can be interpreted both meta-ontologically (τᾶγαθόν is not the being, and is not a being either) or ontologically (τᾶγαθόν is not identical with the being, but it is a being). Let us call the former type S3-μοι, and the latter S3-οι. Now, S3-μοι is logically correct, but it does not occur in the history of interpretation for the simple reason that if a scholar can admit that τᾶγαθόν is not a being at all, there is no need for him to qualify or weaken Plato’s 509b claims by non-identity interpretation. He is well satisfied with S1 type interpretation. As for S3-οι, it does occur in the history of interpretation often, but it is logically incorrect. If τᾶγαθόν is a being, as S3-οι would have it, then it does participate in the Form of being and hence is dependent on it, not superior to it, contrary to Plato’s claim of superiority. This kind of fallacious ontological version of S3 will be analyzed in the section on ontological interpretations.

§ VI. Contemporary ontological interpretations: general strategies

Most common general strategy of ontological interpretation in the contemporary scholarship is teleological (structural) reduction of the transcendence of τᾶγαθόν. The prompter and initiator of such an approach in modern scholarship was F.M. Cornford:

But can it be proved that these words [that the good is beyond being] mean anything more than that, whereas you can always ask the reason

for a thing's existence and the answer will be that it exists for the sake of its goodness, you cannot ask for a reason for goodness; the good is an end in itself; there is no final cause beyond it? ... The 'reason' or 'cause' that explains all existence might be described as 'beyond' the existence it explains; and being the good or end of that existence, it will be superior to it in worth²⁷.

The point is picked up in two works, most significant for the xx century Plato studies, J.C.B. Gosling's *Plato*, where the author claims that the vision of τάγαθόν is "the vision of how everything fits"²⁸ and T. Irwin's *Plato's Moral Theory*:

The Good is the formal and final cause of the Forms' being what they are; they are rightly defined when they are shown to contribute to the Good which is superior to them. However, the Good is not some further being besides the Forms; when we have correctly defined them, connected in a teleological system, we have specified the Good, which just is the system²⁹.

Among contemporary scholars the view is notably represented by Gail Fine: "the good is not a distinct form, but the teleological structure of things"³⁰. Among other representatives of the teleological (or structural) reduction of the transcendence of τάγαθόν are H. Cherniss, R. Allen, M. Isnardi-Parente, L. Brisson³¹.

Another general strategy would be a rhetorical reduction of the transcendence of τάγαθόν, which emphasizes the importance of the qualifying phrase and/or takes the whole ἐπέκεινα passage as a rhetorical exaggeration³².

Now we turn to a paper which stands somewhere in between the general and special strategies, G. Santas's "The Form of the Good in Plato's *Republic*", first published in 1980. It has greatly influenced contemporary scholarship; however, as nothing there is said explicitly of

²⁷ Cornford 1939: 132.

²⁸ Gosling 1973: 118, cf. 57-71.

²⁹ Irwin 1977: 225.

³⁰ Fine 2003: 98.

³¹ Cherniss 1945: 98, n. 142; Allen 1983: 194; Isnardi-Parente 1986: 23; Brisson 1994.

³² Hitchcock 1985: 90, n. 56; Murphy 1951: 183; Penner 2003: 221; Brisson 1995: 127 argues: "The good is said to be beyond being in the *Republic*, not in an absolute sense, because if this were the case it would be both unthinkable and unspeakable, but in dignity and power".

the semantics or scope of οὐσία, I place it closer to the category of general interpretations. Santas's interpretation makes use of the distinction between the proper and ideal attributes of Forms, first introduced by Aristotle (*Top.* 137b3–13, cf. 113a24–32, 144a14–22, 154a18–20) and developed by G.E.L. Owen, D. Keyt, G. Vlastos and others; the very terminology of “ideal and proper” belongs to Keyt.

The ideal attributes are properties a Form has *qua* Form, in virtue of its status of being a Form in general, e.g., intelligibility, immutability, being one-over-many, being the ontological source for its sensible instances. These properties constitute “Formness”. The proper attributes are properties a Form of F has *qua* Form of F, in virtue of its status of being a particular Form of F.

Santas supposes that the Form of τὰγαθόν is a Form of Formness, i.e. the Meta-Form in virtue of participation in which Forms have their ideal attributes (we might call it a second-order Form). “The ideal attributes of all the Forms other than the Form of the Good are proper attributes of the Form of the Good”³³. It seems that Santas identifies τὰγαθόν with being, conflates them: “here we do have a conflation of superlative reality and superlative goodness of kind”³⁴. Later Santas has specifically clarified his position as ontological. And here we turn to our section on special strategies.

§ VII. Contemporary ontological interpretations: special strategies

Christopher Shields agrees with Santas in his interpretation of the Form of τὰγαθόν as a Form of Formness responsible for ideal attributes. He just specifies the ontological status of the Form of τὰγαθόν as he sees it and provides counterarguments to μοι — the points, which were so obviously lacking in Santas' paper. “We should regard the Form of the Good as one Form among many other Forms, and as performing a function which other Forms perform for both Forms and particulars”³⁵, Shields contends. “The Form of the Good is a Form alongside

³³ Santas 1980: 381.

³⁴ *Ibid.*: 384.

³⁵ Shields 2011: 289–290.

other Forms ... it has whatever ontology each and every other Form has”³⁶. How to defend this against compelling οὐκ οὐσίας phrase? Shields takes 509b as non-identity thesis with οὐσία understood as Being: “while necessarily co-extensive with Being, the Form of the Good is not therefore to be identified with it”. Shields supports his non-identity view of 509b by paralleling it with three more emphatic non-identity claims in Plato’s account: “In four places, in two sets of parallel passages in the Analogy of the Sun, Plato cautions against an impulse we might feel to identify qualities which, he insists, must be thought of as distinct”³⁷. Thus, Shields is a representative of S₃ type ontological interpretation. On this interpretation, the Form of τάγαθόν is not exalted at all. This does not fit with the dramatic context, the highest point in the *Republic*’s “ascent from the Cave”, amazed exclamations of Glaucon, modesty and awe with which Socrates approaches the subject, the role of τάγαθόν in the life of the State and individual, and with other attributes of τάγαθόν as described by Plato. Shields’s interpretation simply emasculates τάγαθόν.

Another representative of S₃ type interpretation is D. Hitchcock. He is more subtle and sensitive to the “divine superiority” of τάγαθόν, yet its function is as in Santas: τάγαθόν is a Form of Formness. Hitchcock clarifies the Formness as Uniformness (having one and the same form no matter what, and this uniformness is a criteria of full reality, existence and intelligibility). As a Form, τάγαθόν “is itself, however, uniform (by virtue of the principle of self-predication) and thus itself exists fully and is intelligible”³⁸.

All these S₃ type interpretations³⁹ face a dilemma which destroys them. Either the Form of τάγαθόν participates in the Form of being, i.e. is dependent on it and not superior to it, or the Form of τάγαθόν does not participate in being, in which case it is not a being at all. The latter makes the interpretation meta-ontological, which is quite the opposite of what the proponents of S₃ wanted to prove; the former is not ade-

³⁶ Ibid.: 283.

³⁷ Ibid.: 293.

³⁸ Hitchcock 1985: 74.

³⁹ Another representative is C. Rowe; see, e.g., Rowe 2007: 152.

quate to Plato's text, his exaltation of *τάγαθόν* as a highest principle. Therefore, the non-identity interpretation in its ontological version (S₃-textscoi) is untenable and contradicts the superiority of *τάγαθόν*. The non-identity interpretation in its meta-ontological version (S₃-μοι) is logically correct, but has no proponents (for if one admits μοι, there is no need to strive to qualify and weaken Plato's meaning at 509b).

So far, we are done with the first column of our chart of interpretations (S₁–S₃), the column which renders οὐσία as being. Generally, as we have seen, this rendering gives us μοι, except for one untenable ontological interpretation of S₃. Now we turn to the second column (S₄–S₆), which renders οὐσία as essence. Logically, this will give us a set of ontological interpretations.

A prominent representative of S₄ type interpretation is Gerhard Seel, and I shall quote him extensively, because of the logical clarity his statements impose on the subject. In his own words, he goes at the same direction as Santas, but makes one step further:

According to Santas, the Form of the Good is a higher-order form, a kind of “metaform”. I think that this is an important step in the right direction. However, Santas doesn't go far enough. According to him, what the Form of the Good contains are — in modern terms — one-place second-order predicates. I want to argue, however, that it must contain two-and-more-place second-order predicates, i.e., relations, as well. For the answer to our question cannot simply be that at the end of the dialectical movement we see that all the elements of the system of forms are essences insofar as they have the ideal attributes of essences in common — this fact we knew right from the beginning. What we rather see are the logical relations among the essences that allow us to define them, and finally the organization and the perfect, thoroughgoing regularity⁴⁰.

Further, Seel identifies *τάγαθόν* as the form of order, which function is “assigning to each essence its due place in the system according to the relation of genus and species. ... The essences have their ‘truth’ and their ‘being’ in nothing else but in these relations”⁴¹. “In

⁴⁰ Seel 2007: 182.

⁴¹ Ibid.: 183. Cf. *Prm.* 133d.

this sense, then, the Form of the Good is the cause of the existence of the essences"⁴². "This would also explain why Plato says that the Form of the Good lies beyond essence. ... Goodness is the form of the system itself"⁴³.

So far, this seems similar to the teleological (structural) reduction of the transcendence of *τάγαθόν*. Seel, however, adds to it a thorough logical analysis of how exactly the Form of *τάγαθόν* is supposed to effectuate its function, clarifies the usage of *οὐσία* and contrast details of his views with views of other scholars⁴⁴. The important point which distinguishes Seel is that *τάγαθόν* in his interpretation "is not the teleological structure itself, i.e., the system individual forms are a part of, but the basic principle that underlies its construction and the properties thereof". *Τάγαθόν* is not also the highest genus, pace Baltes, reached in the upward movement of dialectics: "the highest genus is much too abstract and too weak to establish the whole system of essences. In order to do this the dialectician needs the apparatus of the logical relations among essences and the *differentiae specificae*"⁴⁵.

Finally, Seel takes *οὐσία* to mean essence, with the universal quantifier, which renders 509b as "the Good is not an essence at all" (S4). His point is best seen and clarified by contrast with Baltes' S5 reading.

Baltes also takes *οὐσία* to mean essence, but with the limiting, not universal, quantifier: *τάγαθόν* "is not *οὐσία* in the same sense as the *οὐσία* caused by it, just as the sun was not *γένεσις* in the same sense as the *γένεσις* caused by it"⁴⁶. The *ἐπέκεινα* passage, on Baltes's reading, means simply that *τάγαθόν* is "beyond any particular essence"⁴⁷. Yet *τάγαθόν* is a highest essence, "being in its purest and simplest form — τὸ ὄν *per se*"⁴⁸. Baltes identifies *τάγαθόν* with the τοῦ ὄντος *ἰδέα* of Plato's *Sph.* 254a, a highest genus reached by *σύνοψις*.

⁴² Ibid.: 185.

⁴³ Ibid.: 183.

⁴⁴ Ibid.: 185, n. 40.

⁴⁵ Ibid.: 185.

⁴⁶ Baltes 1999: 359.

⁴⁷ Ibid.: 360.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Baltes, it seems, envisages this highest genus, τὸ ὄν *per se*, as including all Forms. This is why he sympathizes with D. Luban who comes to the conclusion “that the Good is the world of the Forms, seen as a unified whole”⁴⁹. However, while Luban identifies τὰγαθόν with the whole Line, Baltes identifies it with an apex of the Line.

Finally, we shall consider S6, which is quite opposed to S5. S5 tends to say that τὰγαθόν, as a highest genus, embraces and includes the whole world of Forms (as genus includes species) and in this sense might be said to be identical with the world of Forms as a whole (most explicitly in Luban). S6, on the contrary, interprets 509b as simply denying this identity. Beierwaltes writes:

This “beyond the Being” is not to be understood in a sense that the Good has no being. How would this be possible when the Good is the source of being for the rest of the Forms? Ἐπέκεινα means “beyond”, excluding all that is under it. Οὐσία means here the realm of Forms and not simply “being”⁵⁰.

§ VIII. Τὰγαθόν as unity

All these logical possibilities and varieties of interpretations being considered, one thing is certain: Plato does not give us a sufficient and unambiguous account of τὰγαθόν. And he does so consciously and intentionally, notifying us several times. Thus, at 506de Socrates says that “even to arrive at my current beliefs about it [i.e. τὰγαθόν] seems to be beyond the range of our present discussion”, and the cause is clear: “You won’t be able to follow me any further ... though there is no lack of eagerness on my part”. This suggests, as in many other passages, that Plato restricts his speech and especially his writings depending on the audience, and for this reason we have mostly hints, images, and metaphors concerning τὰγαθόν.

My approach here is to use evidences about Plato’s inner Academic teachings on τὰγαθόν⁵¹ and, above all, the point that Plato identified

⁴⁹ Baltes 1999: 360, n. 30.

⁵⁰ Beierwaltes 1957: 46.

⁵¹ A list of testimonies see, e.g., in Catan 1990: 203–218.

τάγαθόν with τὸ ἔν, as a probable hypothesis, which has to be verified on the material of the dialogues themselves. After all, these evidences are too strong to be simply ignored; if, verified by the dialogues, they fail — we leave them as useless for our interpretative purposes, but if they stand and, moreover, render the variegated puzzles of the dialogues into a coherent and revealing picture — they must be acknowledged as the key to an authentic interpretation.

Let us first take a glance at the passages in the dialogues which connect goodness with unity⁵². Some of these passages identify goodness with oneness more or less explicitly: *R.* 462b, 443de, 423a, 423d, etc. Other passages do it implicitly, in the form of hints, e.g., 509c, 508a⁵³. All these considered, the identification of τάγαθόν with τὸ ἔν can be grounded in the text of the *Republic* itself. The question is: what does identification of τάγαθόν with τὸ ἔν give us in terms of solving our interpretative difficulties? What advantages does it have over other interpretations, both general and specific? How does it solve the problem of the transcendence of τάγαθόν and the apparent conflict between group I and group II?

To answer this question, we need to start where Plato begins his account of τάγαθόν — from the theory of Forms (*R.* 507a–c). There is something in common among a plurality of things which we call by the same name, i.e. some common objective intelligible character or structure F. Thus, the plurality of triangular things has a common intelligible character — triangularity, for the sake of which they are called by their common name “triangles”. And there is a single superior principle or substantiation Φ of this character F, which is the ontological source of F. This principle Φ is called a Form or idea, and sometimes marked by the word “itself”: Φ is a character F itself. Thus, the Form of a triangle or triangularity itself is the ontological source of the triangularity as a property possessed by triangles, the ontological source of their possessing that property and of being triangles in general. Same reasoning

⁵² Such lists can be found in Reale 1997: 145–151, 193–209, 271–274; Schindler 2008: 116–117; Perl 2014: 55; Desjardins 2004: 87–88, 105–112.

⁵³ For analysis of these hints see especially Reale 1991: 204–207.

is applicable to any genera or quality of sensible things: their being is derivative from the corresponding ideas.

The Forms, although each being a unity-over-plurality-of-sensibles, by themselves also constitute a plurality of Forms, a genus of Forms, having some specific character in common. The essence of this character is being a unity-over-plurality. If a plurality of things, in this case Forms, have some common character, for the sake of which they are called by the very name Forms, there must be an ontological ground for this common character, the Form of Forms or the Formness itself. The Formness itself would be a perfect instantiation of the character Forms have in common, an absolute measure of it, while the Forms participating in this character possess this character only partially, in the limited sense. Since the character in question is being a unity-over-plurality, or, simply, Unity, which Forms possess only partially, each Form being a unity over some particular plurality of sensibles, there must be the unity itself, the unity in the absolute sense, the unity over everything, the superior ontological source of everything. Here we have reached an apex of Plato's metaphysics, a fulfillment of his intuition and search for unity.

However, we can distinguish different senses in which being always possesses the character of unity/oneness:

U1. Each being is a unity of its constituent parts.

U2. Each particular being is numerically one.

U3. Each intelligible being is a unity over its sensible instances.

U4. Each intelligible is uniform: "Form's invariability over time and its invariability over aspects"⁵⁴.

U5. Each being is a product of unity of subject and object (oneness of thinking and being, the intellect and the intelligible, as was explained in the discussion on epistemological aspect of the analogy of the sun).

Here we have a problem of univocity. If all these senses are different and not reducible to *one* sense, then it would be absurd to claim that there is one idea of unity which is responsible for all of U1–U5 (as it would be absurd to claim that there is one idea for a bank of the river

⁵⁴ Hitchcock 1985: 73.

and for a financial bank just because they share the same name). I shall, however, claim, that all these senses do boil down to one and that Plato is right in reducing all of these to one idea.

Each being is numerically one. What does it imply? First, that each being is distinguished from other beings; second, which is presupposed by the first, that each being is distinguished from other beings as a wholeness, as some unit, some integrity of its constituent parts. E.g., we cannot say that some unconditioned part of the water in the ocean is one, or unity, or piece, unless we have specified the limits of this part of the ocean, having distinguished it from other parts. This procedure always implies that now we consider this distinguished part as a system, as some wholeness and integrity of its constituent parts. Thus, U₁ and U₂ are different aspects of the same idea of oneness, not different senses of predication.

The case with U₃ is more complicated, for to prove that Plato's theory of Forms presupposes that sensible instances of a Form are indeed its constituent parts would take a space of another article. I shall not undertake this argument here. Let us consider the relation of a Form to its instances as a relation of a genus to its species. Species are, in a sense, the constituent parts of a genus. On this probable hypothesis, U₃ boils down to U₁. Then the claim U₄ simply boils down to the numerical unity of a Form through time, space and the whole universe. Finally, U₅ obviously presupposes a unity of constituent parts: we have seen in the analysis of the epistemological function of *τάγαθόν* that vision is a unity of the eye and the seen, thinking is a unity of the mind and the thinkable. Thus, all of U₁–U₅ claims fall under the idea of unity, for all of them have a single core: a unity of its constituent parts.

Now let us see how the interpretation of *τάγαθόν* as unity relates to the interpretations of scholars which we have analyzed above. On the one hand, the unity is a Form of Formness, which agrees with Santas and Hitchcock. However, the unity is at the same time “the basic principle that underlies its [the world of Forms'] construction and the properties thereof”, which agrees with Seel⁵⁵. Moreover, since we have considered the relation of participation as analogical to the relation of

⁵⁵ Seel 2007: 185.

logical inclusion, the unity is the highest genus (as in Baltes), which, as all-inclusive, is identical with the whole system of Forms and cosmos (Luban), while being also the final cause and teleological structure of the cosmos (as in Fine, Gosling, Irwin, etc.). In other words, the identification of τὰγαθόν with the unity affords us a dialectical synthesis of differing interpretations, placing conjunction where scholars tend to put disjunction. Finally, this identification solves the problem of the apparent conflict between passages of groups I and II.

Precisely in this relation of participation lies the key to the solution of the problem of the apparent sets I–II conflict. Plato explains the relation of participation by the analogy with reflection⁵⁶. The being of reflection is derivative from the being of the reflected object. In the language of Plato, reflection participates in the reflected object. The important point here is that the reflected object is, on the one hand, transcendent to reflection insofar as it is located outside of and exists independently of reflection, on the other hand, it is present to reflection insofar as the being of reflection is nothing else but manifestation and presence of the reflected object. Hence, here we have an amazing paradox: immanence and transcendence are not contradictory, but complimentary⁵⁷. Although the complementarity of immanence and transcendence in Plato's metaphysics was brilliantly accounted for in this article by Perl⁵⁷, he did not apply it to solving the paradox of supposedly contradictory characterizations of τὰγαθόν in the *Republic*, as I propose. Understanding τὰγαθόν as the unity allows us to apply the following words of Perl to the problem at hand: “immanence and transcendence are not opposed ... on the contrary, the former implies the latter. That is to say, precisely in that the forms are present in their instances, they are *ipso facto* also separate from them in all the senses which Plato claims”⁵⁹.

⁵⁶ As in Divided Line simile (509d–511e), in the beginning of book x, and in *Sph.* 240a. The very term εἶδωλον, by which Plato designates the instances of Forms, implies the analogy of reflection.

⁵⁷ Perl 1999: 340.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Each entity participates in the unity insofar as each entity is a unit, numerically one and composed of the united plurality of parts, i.e. insofar as it is a being. Its participation in the unity accounts for its being and its goodness. This implies that such a unity is not just some useless abstract notion, but is directly applicable to Plato's ethics, psychology, and politics, this is the unity "which every soul pursues, and for the sake of which it does everything" (ὁ δὴ διώκει μὲν ἅπαντα ψυχὴ καὶ τούτου ἕνεκα πάντα πράττει, R. 505de).

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