

Traces of the Platonic Theory of Evil in the *Theaetetus*

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The purpose of this article is to offer analysis of the passage on evil in the *Theaetetus* 176a4-8. I submit that it stands in an anticipatory relation to Plato's mature theory of evil, as it can be deduced from the *Timaeus* and the *Politicus*. My claim is that in the *Theaetetus* passage two contrary principles are postulated, one of which is the cause of good, while the other is the cause of evil. To support that claim, I shall argue that a) Plato's doctrine of the Forms is present in the *Theaetetus* Digression; b) the word 'good' at 176a6 refers to Plato's highest entity – $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\tau\omicron\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\theta\acute{\omicron}\nu$; c) $\tau\acute{\alpha}\ \kappa\alpha\kappa\acute{\alpha}$ of 176a5 are not to be identified with the opposite of $\tau\omicron\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\theta\acute{\omicron}\nu$ mentioned in the same line; d) the $\upsilon\pi\epsilon\upsilon\alpha\upsilon\tau\iota\omicron\nu$ of 176a6, the subordinated opposite of $\tau\omicron\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\theta\acute{\omicron}\nu$, and the second $\acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\alpha}\gamma\kappa\eta$ in the passage (176a8) could denote the same entity, i.e. the Timaeian Necessity.

1. *Setting the Scene: the Theaetetus Digression*

The most important text for the investigation of the Platonic origin of evil are the cosmological account of the *Timaeus*, the 'great tale' ($\mu\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\alpha\varsigma\ \mu\acute{\upsilon}\theta\omicron\varsigma$, 268d9) of the *Politicus*, as well as the *Laws* X passage on the ontological and causal priority of $\psi\upsilon\chi\acute{\eta}$, and on the allegedly bad, irrational cosmic soul operational in the cosmos (896c-898c). Still, there are several other passages pertinent to the problem, unsystematically dispersed through Plato's numerous writings. Such a short, but rather interesting textual snippet is *Theaetetus* 176a-b, and especially the two clauses at 176a5-8. In this article I shall try to offer some reflections on the passage and clarify its purport, with the intention to emphasize its eminence in the frame of Plato's thoughts on the origin of evil. If the following interpretation has some claim to plausibility, then we are dealing with a text which stands in a programmatic or at least anticipatory connection to the later developments on the issue.

The passage in question is to be found midway through the *Theaetetus*, in the part which Socrates himself closes by pronouncing it a digression from the main flow of the argument (177b8). The famous Digression appears in the course of Socrates' presentation and refutation of

the thesis that *Knowledge is sense perception* (151d-186e). Its immediate context is the restatement and rebuttal of the staged defense of Protagoras' *homo mensura* doctrine, as extended not only to perception, but also to judgments (165e-168c), or more specifically the argument starting with the generally accepted premise that some men are wiser than others, at least in "[t]he matter of what is expedient because it will bring future benefits"¹ (169d-172b). Even a Protagorean must accept that, although most things *are* the way they seem to the individual, there are still some which require an expert's opinion, i.e. which are objectively better known or performed by some people, whom, furthermore, the rest of the population recognizes as experts and prefers as agents in the given cases. Two pairs of judgments are being compared: those concerning sensations versus those concerning soundness of body, and those concerning values versus those concerning social wellbeing. Thus, while the relativity of the degree of saltiness of a broth may be safely maintained, matters of health require objective opinion of an expert physician. Again, while no citizen (or state) is wiser than another in judgment of things commendable, just, or pious, decisions concerning matters of general advantage or disadvantage for the state are readily delegated to the most capable, and the objectivity of their success or failure is easily observable.²

Next Socrates briefly introduces yet another class of men: those who are even greater Protagoreans than Protagoras, due to their adherence to the doctrine of extreme relativism in the field of value judgments. Opinions on what is right, wrong or pious, unlike those concerning sense data, have no standing in nature, but are purely a matter of social convention (172b2-c1).³ This is certainly not an understanding in any way appealing to Plato; he wants to maintain that the commendable, the just, the pious are absolute values. However, a discussion in the direction of establishing such a position would overtake the interlocutors with a greater argument arising from a smaller one (172b9-c1), and therefore it cannot be pursued there and then. So, Plato uses

¹ Guthrie, William Keith Chambers. *A History of Greek Philosophy V: The Later Plato and the Academy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1978), p. 88

² This argument precedes the final refutation of the defense of Protagoras (177c-177d), which simply elaborates on the point already made: 'man the measure' doctrine cannot stand since there are people, including Protagoras himself, who sincerely believe that they know what is better for the rest of the people to do in the future, as well as that they – on the basis of their superior knowledge – are able to predict more accurately future events and states of affairs.

³ Cornford, Francis MacDonald. *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd. 1935), pp. 82f

the Digression mainly as an indirect argument against the relativity of moral values.⁴ But there is much more to it. A perfectly Platonic consequence of the attempt to ascribe objective value to justice or piety is the stealthy introduction of the theory of Forms,⁵ seemingly irrelevant to the dialogue's argumentative strategy and incompatible with its aporetic end. Two other quite striking points are the brief exposition of the nature of evil (176a5-8), and the most direct formulation of Plato's far-reaching exhortation to become like god as far as it is possible (176b1-2), this being the path leading to human happiness and perfection.

At the beginning of the Digression Socrates pauses for a while in his evaluation and criticism of Protagoras' ideas and makes a comparison between a philosopher devoted to intellectual pursuits, and a practical man frequenting the law-courts (172c3-176a2). The former, although socially awkward, rightly enjoys the privilege of being called a free man. He has σχολή for pursuit of any argument he likes for as much time as he likes, and his exertions are not aimed at merely satisfying the bare necessities of life, but at investigating the things as they are, especially the lofty concepts of justice, happiness and the like. The latter, on the other hand, is well adapted to society, but has a slavish mentality and misses the true purpose of human life by focusing on the petty particulars of every day's pleasure and pain. His subjects of choice are mostly discourses concerning the prosecution or defense of some other slave. A flatterer aiming at the pleasure of the jurymen and at the rebuttal of the opponent whose patience is very limited, he is being constantly pressed by time. This comparison brings to mind the contrast drawn in the *Gorgias* between the rhetor and the philosopher,⁶ but its main purpose is to declare clearly the distinction between the objects of their interest – the philosopher's being stable and admirable, the practical man's transitory and useless. These, as will become obvious from the rest of the Digression, are equivalent to Plato's two orders of reality – Being and Becoming. Theodorus the geometrician, one of Socrates' interlocutors in the dialogue, agrees wholeheartedly with what has

⁴ "Plato offers no formal refutation of these claims, but it would seem that the main point of the digression is to make it clear that he sharply disagrees". (Bostock, David. *Plato's Theaetetus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988), p. 98).

⁵ How else should a Platonist argue that goodness, justice, piety, etc., exist by nature, and not by convention only?

⁶ Socrates' description of the philosopher's clumsy behavior in a house of law at 174c is reminiscent of Callicles' fair warning that if unjustly charged, Socrates would have no use of himself as a defender against the accusations (*Gorg.* 486a). It may thus serve as an allusion to his imminent end. The Socrates of the *Theaetetus* is, after all, bound to the *stoa* of the King Archon, to meet Meletus' accusation (210d).

been said, and expresses his belief that, were everyone convinced of the importance of the philosophical investigations, this world would be infested with far less evil than it presently is. On that notice, Socrates utters the sentences which are of crucial importance for us here, and to which we shall return shortly:⁷ “But it is not possible, Theodorus, that evil should be destroyed – for there must always be something opposed to the good: nor it is possible that it should have its seat in heaven. But it must inevitably haunt human life, and prowl about this earth.”⁸ Next we learn that the only way to shun evil is to fly away from this place to the higher region, a task which can be accomplished only by becoming as similar to god as possible: φυγή δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῶν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν (176b1-2). He being the ultimate paradigm of goodness, the task of emulating god is accomplished by perfecting one’s moral character. According to the very well-known Socratic tenet, virtuous life is possible only for those who have acquired wisdom, and here moral perfection is exemplified through the acquisition of two of the five cardinal virtues, namely through becoming just and pious, by means of wisdom: ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι (176b2-3). Plato’s motivation behind the choice of these two particular virtues is quite clear – they were already mentioned at 172b3 as examples of values that were, according to both Protagoras and those who do not accept Protagoras’ teaching in all respect (172b6-7), subjective and relative. Thus the rest of the Digression (176b-177c) is dedicated to drawing a clear distinction between civic and philosophical understanding of justice,⁹ the former depending on conventions underlying human interaction, the latter on wisdom and μίμησις of the perfect paradigm, divine and supremely happy. Civic justice turns out to be nothing else but ignorance and wickedness (176c6), resulting in unholy life on earth and denial of access to the pure realm after death, while philosophic justice is just the opposite, both in substance and results. Real justice is thus an absolute value after all, since it is firmly

⁷ The very fact that Theodorus’ rather general statement receives such an energetic and specific response may be an indication of Plato’s hopes that his readers’ curiosity would now be further stimulated; and that is good and desirable, because he has something very important to say, although he is saying it in only a few words. The austerity of the expression, however, must not fool us: “What is being said in a Platonic dialogue must be watched most carefully: every word counts; some casually spoken words may be more important than lengthy, elaborate statements” (Klein, Jacob. *Plato’s Trilogy: Theaetetus, the Sophist and the Statesman* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1977), p. 2).

⁸ *Tht.* 176a4-8, as translated by Levett, with Burnyeat’s revision (Burnyeat, Myles Fredric. *The Theaetetus of Plato*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 1990), p. 304).

⁹ Piety is completely dropped out of the picture. For possible reasons, see Sedley, David. *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato’s Theaetetus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2004), pp. 82ff.

grounded on and dependent upon the divine paradigm and safeguarded by god himself, who is in no way whatsoever unjust: θεὸς οὐδ'αμῆ οὐδ'αμῶς ἄδικος (176b8-c1). The impression of relativity of justice “[a]rises from the narrow perspective that is enforced if one concentrates on issues of justice and injustice within the city – in the law courts, the assembly, the council.”¹⁰

2. Is Plato's theory of Forms present in the *Theaetetus*?

It is interesting to note that none of the (relatively) recent *Theaetetus* scholars pays much heed to the mention of evil at 176a-b and its implications on Plato's overall view on the subject. Kennedy (1881), Taylor (1926), Cornford (1935), McDowell (1973), Bostock (1988), Burnyeat (1990), Chappell (2004) and Tschemplik (2008), in their commentaries and notes, basically pass over the passage on evil silently, or dedicate only few words to it.¹¹ That is, however, a rather easily understandable omission. All these authors are, naturally, predominantly focused on the epistemological import of the *Theaetetus*, ‘What is knowledge?’ being the main question of the dialogue. They do indeed treat carefully the issue of relativity of justice and the possibility of reading the theory of Forms in the Digression, but these as well are all too closely connected with the epistemological pursuit of the dialogue. If Socrates, albeit indirectly, indeed introduces the Forms in the Digression (and elsewhere in the dialogue), then Cornford might have been right in claiming that the main lesson to be learned from the *Theaetetus* was that no plausible account of knowledge was possible if they were left aside.¹² But one need not go that far; as a

¹⁰ Sedley 2004, p. 65

¹¹ One exception is Stern, Paul. “The Philosophical Importance of Political Life: On the ‘Digression’ in Plato's ‘Theaetetus’” (*The American Political Science Review*, 96. 2. 2002), to some of whose comments I shall turn later. Another one is Guthrie (1978), who dedicates a somewhat lengthy excursus to the problem of evil. In it, however, he does not interpret specifically the *Theaetetus* passage, but presents something like a general theory of evil and its sources that can be extracted from Plato's dialogues (p. 92ff). With this, however, he affirms the importance of the *Theaetetus* bit for Plato's overall theory of evil.

¹² “The *Theaetetus* will formulate and examine the claim of the senses to yield knowledge. The discussion moves in the world of appearance and proves that, if we try to leave out of account the world of true being, we cannot extract knowledge from sensible experience.” (Cornford 1935, p. 7). A similar opinion is summarily expressed in Cherniss, Harold. “The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas”. (*The American Journal of Philology* 57. 4. 1936), pp. 449-451, and taken up by Guthrie: “The attempts to define knowledge in the main part of the dialogue are carried out by every means short of the doctrine of Forms, and end in failure. The digression assures us that the teaching of *Phaedo* and *Republic*, *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* has not been abandoned, and that the successful search for the nature of

matter of fact, nothing precludes McDowell's much milder supposition that if the theory of Forms is present in the Digression, its purpose could simply be to help Plato assert, contrary to the opinion of the anonymous opponents, that the moral values are firm and objective things.¹³ That issue is, however, immaterial for our purpose. What is not immaterial is the very question whether the Forms are indeed present in the *Theaetetus*,¹⁴ and here it deserves a little digression of its own.

Some commentators are adamant in their claim that the Forms in the *Theaetetus* are conspicuous by the avoidance of their being properly discussed, as well as that there are more than a few unmistakable indications of their presence. Thus the already mentioned Cornford, Cherniss, Hackford and Guthrie. Others, like Robinson (1950), Cooper (1970)¹⁵ and Bostock (1988)¹⁶ are not in favor of that opinion. Still other scholars are not openly opposed to the idea that Plato lets in his theory of Forms through the back door,¹⁷ while some are quite comfortable with it.¹⁸ This is a huge and still ongoing debate which cannot be paid due attention here. What

knowledge lies beyond Plato's self-imposed limitations here." (1978, p. 91). For the author of the *Didaskalikos* as the Ancient Platonist precursor of Cornford's theory, see Sedley, David. "Three Platonist Interpretations of the *Theaetetus*". In Gill, Christopher and McCabe, Mary Margaret (eds.). *Form and Argument in Later Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996), pp. 89-93.

13 See McDowell, John. *Plato: Theaetetus, Translated with Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 177

14 I am actually concerned with the presence of the Forms in the Digression only, and will disregard few other places in the *Theaetetus* where Plato could be evoking them. For detailed discussion see Cornford 1935, Robinson, Richard. "Forms and Error in Plato's *Theaetetus*" (*Philosophical Review*, 59. 1. 1950), and Hackforth, Reginald. "Platonic Forms in the *Theaetetus*". (*The Classical Quarterly*, 7. 1-2. 1957). They are, respectively, presenting an interpretation that accommodates the Forms into the *Theaetetus*, one that denies that they are mentioned or, even if so, that they serve any substantial purpose in the dialogue, and a vehement defense of the former position.

¹⁵ Cooper's article (Cooper, John M. "Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge ('*Theaetetus*' 184-186)". (*Phronesis*, 15. 2. 1970)) is to a significant degree a reaction to Cornford's and Cherniss' interpretation on Plato's rejection of the thesis that knowledge is *αἴσθησις*. His criticism of the idea that the Forms are in any way invoked in *Tht.* 184b-186e is thorough and sustained. Nevertheless, he does not touch either upon the Digression or upon Socrates' last unsuccessful attempt to define knowledge.

¹⁶ Bostock understands the *Theaetetus* as taking a critical stance towards the Middle-period theory of Forms, especially towards their role as exclusive objects of cognition, and his arguments are again quite compelling. However, he, like Cooper, also never engages with the Digression, which apparently has a different tone and goal from the main bulk of the dialogue.

¹⁷ See e.g. McDowell 1973, pp. 176f, Burnyeat 1990, pp. 38f

¹⁸ See Sedley 2004, p. 71, Tschemplik, Andrea. *Knowledge and Self-Knowledge in Plato's Theaetetus* (Plymouth: Lexington Books 2008), p. 143

we can do, however, is to limit our ambition to the Digression and look for textual indications or evidence for the presence of Plato's most characteristic doctrine of the Middle period.

And indeed, there are at least three statements in the Digression where language and images are used which – especially when placed against the background of their context – are highly evocative of, and probably meant to call to the reader's mind the transcendent Forms. The first one is at 174a1, where Socrates, after explaining to Theodorus that a first-class philosopher is oblivious of the things related to the body, presents the latter's true interest: “exploring in every way the total nature of the things that are, each taken as a whole”¹⁹ (πᾶσαν πάντη φύσιν ἐρευνωμένη τῶν ὄντων ἐκάστου ὄλου). The key word here is, of course, τὸ ὄν, which in the Platonic corpus is often used to refer to the Forms. The next indicative statement is at 174b, where Socrates depicts the philosopher as somebody who is almost unaware whether his neighbor is a man or some other creature, but is nevertheless highly interested to discover “what can a man possibly be” (τί δέ ποτ' ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, 174b3-4). This is very much reminiscent of the Platonic method of dialectical ascent from a sensible particular (in this case the individual human neighbor) to what-the-thing-itself-is (αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν: ἄνθρωπος, ἀγαθόν, κερκίς, ὄνομα, etc.). Still, the statement most suggestive of Plato's theory of Forms at its best is to be found at 175c, where the highest philosopher is depicted in his dealings with the others, when he is doing all he can to drag them out of their slavish state of worrying about mundane issues, and to engage them instead in the investigation of what justice, injustice, kingship, and happiness in themselves are. Here we have almost unmistakable allusion to the Allegory of the Cave of the *Republic* VII,²⁰ complete with the missionary activities of the returnee from the spiritual journey to the Intelligible realm, and the necessary study of the eternal realities behind the particular entities and phenomena.

But whenever, o friend, he drags someone upwards, someone who is willing to step out with him from the discourse ‘What wrong have I done to you or you to me?’ and into examination of justice and injustice themselves, what each of the two in itself is, and how they differ from everything else and from one another (... εἰς σκέψιν αὐτῆς δικαιοσύνης τε καὶ ἀδικίας, τί τε ἐκάτερον αὐτοῖν καὶ τί τῶν πάντων ἢ ἀλλήλων διαφέρετον, 175b9-175c3).

¹⁹ The translations from Greek are mine, unless noted otherwise.

²⁰ See, e.g., Cornford 1935, p. 86; Sedley 2004, p. 73

These few passages are, of course, more suggestive than conclusive, but the arguments of the critics seem to be even less so. Robinson's stance on the issue, which shall be briefly examined here, may be taken as representative of the critics' camp, since his is the most vocal protest against the idea that the theory of Forms plays any role in the *Theaetetus*, the Digression included.

There is some ambiguity involved in the first section of Robinson's article "Forms and Error in Plato's *Theaetetus*". It is, namely, hard to clearly isolate his claim – is he trying to demonstrate that the Forms are "inconspicuous in the *Theaetetus*", or that they "are absent from the *Theaetetus*"? The ambiguity is not only implicit, since on p. 10, while discussing Cornford's interpretation of 185a-e – where knowing things that are common to all is mentioned – he writes: "[I] think it quite possible that they are Forms." I shall nevertheless assume the latter, since that is how he closes the section on the Forms: "This account of the reason why the Forms do not appear in the *Theaetetus*..."²¹

Robinson builds up his case on several assumptions, but those which are not concerned with the Digression itself will be omitted. We shall focus on three. Firstly, he writes that two doctrines closely associated with the theory of Forms are absent from the dialogue, "[n]amely recollection and the absolute difference of knowledge from opinion."²² However, nobody claims that the fully developed theory of Forms with all its auxiliaries is presented in the *Theaetetus*; the whole idea is that its inconspicuousness, combined with the occasional strong allusions to it, should help any "Platonist [to] draw the necessary inference."²³

Secondly, on p. 5 he insists that "The general atmosphere of the dialogue seems unfavorable to the theory of Forms", especially "the empiricist and subjectivist tone of the *Theaetetus*". It is a fact that all theories of knowledge discussed in the *Theaetetus* are either strongly subjective or empirical or both, that they involve knowing particulars, etc. But does that mean that Plato himself is holding an empiricist's stance? Certainly not. Socrates, after all, is satisfied with none of the attempts to discover the essence of knowledge. Guthrie writes: "[a]ll empirical and subjective theories discussed are shown to fall, and the dialogue could be regarded

²¹ Robinson 1950, p. 18

²² *Op. cit.*, p. 3

²³ Cornford 1935, p. 162. Besides, as we learn from Sedley 1996, pp. 95ff, some ancient Platonist argued that the theory of recollection was indirectly alluded to in some passages of the *Theaetetus*.

as a demonstration of their inadequacy.”²⁴ Moreover, the spirit of the Digression is not only non-empiricist and favorable to the Forms, but even requires them strongly.

Thirdly, and most importantly, Robinson writes: “[In the *Theaetetus*] There is little or no talk about two worlds”,²⁵ and:

The theory of Forms is the theory that there is a second world, of objects which, unlike the objects here, have the attributes of being perfect, unchanging, eternal, divine, etc.; and this theory is not implied by the *Theaetetus*’ description of the philosopher [in the Digression] though it is not denied either.²⁶

It is very hard to justify these claims in the face of the evidence from the Digression. As far as the first one is concerned, there actually *is* a strong indication of the existence of two separate realms, to which objects of sensation and thought are respectively delegated:

But in fact only his body reposes and has its home in the city, while his mind ... rushes, as Pindar says, both ‘beneath the earth’, measuring its surface, and ‘beyond the sky’, observing the stars, and exploring in every way the total nature of the things that are, each taken as a whole, not at all lowering itself to what is close at hand.” (173e2-174a2).²⁷

Furthermore, even a negligent reader is bound to stumble upon the explicit mention of two worlds at 176a8-b1: “Therefore one ought to endeavor to flee from this world to the other as fast as possible”. The divinity and eternity of the other realm, denied by Robinson in the second quotation above, is again strongly asserted in the Digression. Taking a flight from here is accomplished by becoming as godlike as possible, while emulating god is advised since his state of being stands in stark contrast with the state of affairs in this world. Then again, there is a very clear account of bifurcation of the All, which does not leave much hope for Robinson’s purpose: we hear of two paradigms established in reality, one of divine happiness, the other of godless wretchedness.²⁸ Those who lead a life of unrighteousness will become more and more like the

²⁴ Guthrie 1978, p. 66

²⁵ Robinson, *ibid.*

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 9

²⁷ Sedley (2004, p. 71) concludes his interpretation of the passage thus: “The philosopher’s flight to the heaven, his act of intellectual self-distancing from civic concerns, is for Plato his transportation from sensible to intelligible world, where the truly non-relativized paradigm of justice, and the other Forms, are to be found.”

²⁸ Plato’s own words are: παραδειγμάτων, ᾧ φίλε, ἐν τῷ ὄντι ἐστώτων ..., and he does not mention anything like ‘the All’. By it here I mean τὸ ὅλον, all there is, including both the transcendent world and the world of Becoming. The two patterns would then be reminiscent of the two possible models that any craftsman may use, spoken of in the *Timaeus* 28a6-b4 – the unchanging and the generated one. This

latter, and will be shunned from the region where there is no evil (176e-177a). The first paradigm's divinity naturally invokes the other properties that are, according to Robinson, missing here, namely perfection, eternity, etc. Its perfection is implied, *inter alia*, by the fact that it is free from evils, while its eternity is implied by the allusion to the process of reincarnation of the wicked in this world, which is said to continue for all time (ἀεὶ). If existence, though extended through a spectrum of diverse life forms, goes on uninterrupted for the wicked, how much more stable and permanent is it for the righteous, inhabiting the divine realm?

Besides the strong other-worldly spirit of the above quoted passages, there are in the Digression those allusions to the Forms themselves that were already mentioned above. And even if Robinson were justified in his attempt to explain away 175c, which its insistence on investigation of justice and happiness themselves, as simply Socratic "request for definition of the essence,"²⁹ which does not presuppose the theory of Forms, it is hard to see how the same strategy could be applied to 174b. Therein, as already said, while describing the 'leader in philosophy', Socrates says that he invests all his efforts in the attempt to ascertain what man is, and what powers and properties distinguish this nature from any other (174b3-5). Considering that the prime Socratic objects of investigation were the definitions of the ethical and aesthetic concepts, like virtue, pleasure, beauty, etc., inquiry into the nature, properties and differentia of man seems instead quite Platonic and hence might have firm foundation in the theory of Forms. Therefore, I believe it is safe to conclude that, for one reason or another, the most eminent Platonic doctrine finds its place in the *Theaetetus*.

understanding involves a very loose sense of τὸ ὄν – reality as including both Being and Becoming, since the latter is not mere illusion (the following are some of the passages where Plato ascribes, indirectly or directly, certain kind of existence to the world of Becoming: *Phd.* 79a; *Tht.* 182c-183c; *Tim.* 35a, 37a-b, 52a-d, *Phil.* 23c-27c, etc.). Admittedly, making up one's mind on the question what these paradigms actually are is not an easy task. 'Reality' could be taken to refer to the realm of Forms, while the patterns would be e.g. the Form of Virtue and the Form of Vice. Presently it is not possible to discuss the unresolved issue whether Plato admits into his ontology Forms corresponding to bad things (e.g. Cherniss, Harold. "The Sources of Evil According to Plato". (*Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 98. 1. 1954), p. 27 is adamant that he does, Guthrie (1978, p. 97ff) sits on the fence). Third option is that the paradigm 'of divine happiness' represents God: "The wording, taken in context, makes it virtually explicit that the good paradigm that we are urged to imitate is, once again, god" (Sedley 2004, p. 78f). Nevertheless, regardless of which interpretation is assumed, it remains undisputable that Plato here, against Robinson's contention, draws clear distinction between a province divine and its opposite.

²⁹ Robinson, *ibid.*

3. *Evil in the Theaetetus 176a*

After this necessary excursus from our main topic, it is now time to go back to the *Theaetetus* 176a-b and the seeming opposition of τὸ ἀγαθόν and τὰ κακά mentioned there. Despite its brevity, the passage may be interpreted as containing some valuable insights into the issue, possibly developed by Plato in the later dialogues in some more detail. Plotinus, for example, clearly acknowledges its importance, and refers to it rather often. He starts *Ennead* I.2, by quoting a part of this passage,³⁰ and comments on it in *Ennead* I.8.6, which is rather apposite, since treatise I.8 is entitled “On What Are and Whence Come Evils.” He brings it up once again in III.2.5 and III.2.15, where important theodicean questions are discussed. It is thus clear that those few sentences from the *Theaetetus* are one of the most prominent threads woven into the fabric of his own theory of evil.³¹

What could, then, be the import of the passage on evil as presented by Plato in the *Theaetetus*? Thematically, it may be analyzed as being constituted of two parts. The first one states that the evils cannot be eradicated (176a4-5): ἀλλ' οὐτ' ἀπολέσθαι τὰ κακά δυνατόν,³² and gives the reason why it is so (176a5-6): ὑπεναντίον γάρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀεὶ εἶναι ἀνάγκη.³³ The second ascribes a particular location to the evils, calls attention to their inevitability, and possibly their origin as well (176a6-8): οὐτ' ἐν θεοῖς αὐτὰ ἰδρῦσθαι, τὴν δὲ θνητὴν φύσιν καὶ τόνδε τὸν τόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης.³⁴

³⁰ “Since the evils are here and prowl about this place as a matter of necessity, and since the soul desires to escape the evils, it must flee from here” (*Enn.* I.2.1.1). Plotinus goes on, following the text of the *Theaetetus*, to identify the escape with becoming similar to god, and becoming similar to god with becoming perfectly virtuous. The interesting step is his claim that the god in question is the World Soul.

³¹ Armstrong, Arthur Hillary. (tr.). *Plotinus: Ennead III* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1993), p. 60, n. 1, is even more convinced in its importance: “The often-repeated quotation from Plato, *Theaetetus* 176A5, one of the cardinal texts of Plotinian Neoplatonism.”

³² “But it is not possible that the evils should be destroyed.”

³³ “For it is necessary that the Good always has some opposite.”

³⁴ “Nor it is possible that they are situated among the gods, but they prowl about the mortal nature and this place as a matter of necessity.”

3.1 *The status of τὸ ἀγαθόν in 176a6*

A point of primary importance with regard to the first part of the passage on evil is that by the mention of τὸ ἀγαθόν, Plato does not want to refer to any particular good, but to the Good itself. This is, of course, just an assumption, although several reasons for its plausibility may be offered, listed here in increasing order of substantiality.

A) In the *Theaetetus* there is a single mention (and that one in the center of the dialogue) of the good with a definite article and in the singular, which is, since the *Republic*, a standard Platonic locution for the highest reality. This certainly does not prove anything, but is highly reminiscent of the singularity and centrality of the Form of the Good in Plato's philosophy.

B) One undisputable purpose of the Digression is to draw a contrast between civic, i.e. apparent, and true or philosophic virtue. Plato holds that not only the common so-called boons of aristocratic lineage and wealth, but even highly commendable qualities like being pious or courageous, when used unwisely, cease to be good. Hence, the vital element of philosophic virtue is knowledge.³⁵ Knowledge, on the other hand, is primarily of the Forms, while all of them owe both their being and knowability to the Good. Virtue, thus, ultimately depends on the Good. And vice, if opposite of virtue, has to depend on something that stands as the Good's opposite. This allows for the interpretation of τὸ ἀγαθόν in 176a4-6 as the Good, provided the ὑπεναντίον is understood as distinct from, and underlying, τὰ κακά, a thesis which will be discussed later.

C) In a similar vein, I believe that a reader who carefully takes into account the broader context of the Digression, as well as the foregoing attempt to show that Plato's theory of Forms is at least implicit in it, would agree that the conclusion of the latter shouldn't be taken lightly. And if the Forms are indeed there in the Digression, it is small wonder that in its most remarkable passage, where Socrates is talking of the good and the evil, of god and salvation, Plato's highest principle would also be evoked.

D) Finally, had Plato not had in mind the Good while writing 176a, it would be hard to determine what he was referring to. Some particular good, like pleasure or virtue? But that is not

³⁵ Socrates famously believed that all virtue is knowledge (as argued in the *Laches*, 194d ff, especially 199c, and in the *Protagoras*, 332a-360d and 361b), and Plato never really disassociated himself from his master's stance on the issue. An echo of this understanding in the *Theaetetus* Digression is found in Plato's exhortation to become as similar to god as possible. That aim is achieved by becoming just and pious, *through wisdom*.

possible. For one thing, were that the case, Plato should have used plural number of the noun (τᾶγαθα), its counterpart being in plural as well (τὰ κακά). For another, Plato never considers any particular ‘good’ to be a proper good at all; pleasure had been dismissed as such already in, e.g. the *Euthydemus* and the *Gorgias*. Furthermore, since the philosopher of the Digression has been depicted as someone who soars high with his interests, ‘seeking after the total nature of each of the things that are’ (174a1), it would be absurd to assume that τὸ ἀγαθόν here designates material gain or some civic virtue. Could it, however, refer to ‘philosophic virtue,’ or to virtue as an absolute value? This proposal seems to be in tune with the overall tone of the Digression, where the philosopher’s virtues, like justice and piety, stand in stark contrast to those of a *rhetor* absorbed in legal practice. That would, however, again lead us to the Forms: “True justice is to be found only after an intellectual ascent to the intelligible world outside the cave. For Plato true justice is a Form...”³⁶ Now, once we find ourselves in the transcendent realm, it is quite natural to suppose that Plato would bring into the picture the one Form on which all the rest depend – which he actually does by writing down its name. Even if it weren’t explicitly mentioned, at least since the *Republic* it is known that any Form, including the moral ones like Justice, is “[i]tself fully understandable only in the light of a yet higher entity, the Form of the Good ...”³⁷ Therefore, the assumption that the thing in question here is the Good itself seems to be all but unreasonable and unacceptable.

3.2 *The status of the ὑπεραντίον in 176a6*

The next thing to be noted in the first part of the passage under scrutiny is Plato’s claim that the Good always has some opposite, and has it in a specific way, namely necessarily (ἀνάγκη). But what does Plato mean by this opposition? Certainly not that human experience must include both the good and the bad, both joys and sorrows, both pleasures and pains. First, because I already tried to argue that Plato’s use of τὸ ἀγαθόν has a deeper purport, and second, because such a statement is rather trivial. Nor is he claiming that wherever there is virtue, there has to be vice; within the confines of Platonic philosophy that is simply false. As Plotinus points

³⁶ Sedley 2004, p. 76

³⁷ *Ibid.*

out, there is an escape from the evils of the soul,³⁸ and his opinion is clearly traceable back to Plato's writings, like, e.g., the creation story of the *Timaeus*, and thus easily confirmable as Platonic. It is not only that death, vice and other evils do not abide among the celestial gods,³⁹ but even the souls of the mortals are eligible for full redemption and re-appropriation of their constitutional state of purity.⁴⁰ It can be also deduced from the *Theaetetus* itself that those who are true philosophers and look upon the divine paradigm live lives free of vice, and consequently, to a large extent free of evil. This means that the existence of virtue does not necessitate the presence of virtue's opposite, i.e. vice. Therefore, my assumption is that the opposite Plato is talking about has to be some kind of principle, taking into consideration the earlier claim that the Good was a principle, and Plato's statement that it has an opposite. The discussion of *what kind* of principle it is has to be postponed for another occasion. In what immediately follows, only a few hints will be given. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato himself leaves the issue open, and does not disclose anything about the nature and the properties of that opposite. Two points, however, have to be mentioned.

a) The opposite (ὕπεναντίον τι) spoken of here is different from the evils described as indestructible. These, as it is obvious from the use of the plural (τὰ κακά), are some individual evils, and cannot be the proper opposite of τὸ ἀγαθόν Plato is referring to. This would be so even regardless of whether τὸ ἀγαθόν is understood as *some good*, or *the Good*. In the first case, the evils cannot play the role of the opposite of the good because they are many, while one single thing can have one opposite only, as already argued in *Protagoras* 322a-333b. In the second, because Plato seems to equate those evils with the opposites of justice, piety and wisdom (*Tht.* 176b1-3), as aptly noted by Plotinus as well: τὰ κακὰ αὐτῷ ἢ κακία καὶ ὅσα ἐκ κακίας.⁴¹ Since the evils, which are here mostly moral insufficiencies, already have their appropriate opposites,

³⁸ *Enn.* I.8.5.30

³⁹ The Demiurge, intent on the task to produce the four orders of creatures, first created the celestial gods and made them 'living beings divine and eternal.' See *Tim.* 40a-b, 41a-b

⁴⁰ Even the souls which were deeply implicated in matter can rise above the cycle of repeated incarnation and be reinstated to their original position, provided in this life they manage to align the revolutions of their own circles with those of the circles of the Cosmic Soul. See *Tim.* 42c-d

⁴¹ "For him, the evils are vice and those things that arise from vice" (*Enn.*I.8.6.13). The escape from this world Plato is talking about in the *Theaetetus* is accomplished by acquiring justice and piety guided by wisdom. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that what is to be escaped from, the evils, is human wickedness, i.e. injustice, impiety, ignorance and the rest. That is actually explicitly stated a bit later on, when the account of the two paradigms is introduced (176e3-177a3).

i.e. the virtues, and since those virtues are not, as argued above, what Plato is referring to by his use of τὸ ἀγαθόν, the latter's opposite should be sought somewhere else.

b) Plato's choice of the Greek term that we usually translate with the English word 'opposite' or 'contrary' seems to be deliberate and significant. He is not using the much more customary ἐναντίον, but combines it with the preposition ὑπό, in order to get ὑπεναντίον. This compounded word, in the given context, could denote a notion of contrariety in which one member of the pair subsists on a lower level than the other, an opposite which is somehow subordinate or inferior. And indeed, while the opposites of warm and cold or pleasure and pain share equal ontological status, the same cannot be said of the Good and its opposite. The former is the source of being and knowability of the eternal Realities (*Rep.* 509b), while all that one can say about the latter is that it is coeval with the Good (ὑπεναντίον γάρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀεὶ εἶναι), and that it has to lag far behind it in respect of its ontological weight.⁴²

3.3 *The status of τὰ κακά and their relation to the ὑπεναντίον*

At this point it is not unimportant to note that in the above quoted Levett-Burnyeat translation of the passage, singular is used for τὰ κακά. The English sentence thus construed is bound to give the wrong impression that the evils and the opposite of the Good are one and the same thing. The same mistake is committed by Kennedy, but not by Cornford, McDowell, Chappell and Sedley, although they also seem to follow the Levett-Burnyeat interpretation. In Chappell's translation, the passage runs as follows: "But it is not possible for evils to be destroyed, Theodorus. There always has to be something opposite to the good." I am singling him out, because he adds a footnote to his translation: "Even Plato nods; this feeble untruism is

⁴² As far as Plato's successors are concerned, it is worth to mention that, while Plotinus does not pay much heed to the relatively uncommon substitute for the regular ἐναντίον, Proclus takes it as a deliberate and deeply significant step on Plato's part. As a matter of fact, Proclus also recognizes that Plato's intention behind the application of this word was to indicate a kind of contrariety different from the usually expected one; he, however, ascribes a more specific and much more complex meaning to it. Plato's ὑπεναντίον with Proclus acquires a unique sense of subcontrariety – of course, without having anything in common with the Aristotelian subcontrariety of the Square of Opposites – i.e. it becomes an opposite which is not only subordinate to and of lower ontological status than the Good, but whose very being and power to oppose the latter is ultimately derived from it (see *De Malorum Subsistentia* 49, 50, 54).

unworthy of him. It is true that the *concept* of evil must always have content so long as the concept of good has. It does not follow that evil must actually *exist* so long as good does.”⁴³ Had Plato really intended to say what Chappell in the last sentence claims he did, he would have been guilty not only of untruism, but of inconsistency as well. An attempt was made earlier to show that Plato couldn’t have thought what Chappell imputes to him, since that would contradict some of his important and emphatic claims elsewhere. Therefore, Plato’s claim needn’t be read as a lapse if one accepts the interpretation submitted in this text, according to which he intends to impress upon his readers a metaphysical claim, which is that the Good as a principle necessarily has an opposite. He is *not* talking of any kind of relation between some particular good and evil, which would, besides everything else, be totally out of the context of the Digression.

Another critic, who also holds that the evils are identical with the opposite Plato is bringing up in the passage, comments more extensively on the point, and takes Chappell’s objection to the extreme. He writes:

[E]vils cannot perish because there must always be something contrary to the good. If this is the case, then the existence of that which is good in itself must be dubious: that which is good is so only in relation to something else, specifically, in relation to evil. Without evil, good does not exist. But why must good exist only in relation to evil?⁴⁴

Is Stern justified in raising this objection to the nature and the implications of Plato’s contrariety? I do not think that Plato could be plausibly accused of upholding such an outlook. Stern takes the opposites Plato is talking about in the sense of strongly relative terms, whose description does not only imply a relation to one another; they are also defined as relative, and cannot even exist independently of their respective correlative. This understanding could probably be applied with some accuracy to Heraclitus’ opposites. He is a philosopher who seems to be an adherent of unmitigated relativism on the matter of both perception and value-judgments. For him, it is not only that “the way up and the way down are one and the same” (DK B60), and “the sea is water purest and most impure” (DK B61), but even, according to Hippolytus’ comment in B58, the good and the bad are one. Although Heraclitus, at least in the

⁴³ Chappell, Timothy. *Reading Plato’s Theaetetus* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 2004), p. 125

⁴⁴ Stern 2002, p. 283

case of value-judgments, is taking god's eye view,⁴⁵ his opposites are still highly inter-dependent, incomplete and insignificant without each other. "Members of pairs of correlatives, such as good and evil, or sickness and health, or justice and injustice, have significance only in relation to their opposites."⁴⁶

For Plato no such strong relativity is included in the concepts of the opposites, especially not so in the case of the positive values. While their imperfect instantiations on the material plane of course do have opposites, from the absolute perspective, as Forms, they are both independent and transcendent, while badness and worthlessness seem to be reduced to just various degrees of insufficiencies, having their cause in the primary insufficiency,⁴⁷ to which some attention will be given later. As a matter of fact, Plato does make use of the notion of strongly inter-dependent opposites, in one of the crucial passages of the *Phaedo*, namely in his first proof of the immortality of the soul (70c-72d). But that is an argument concerned with the phenomenon of change, does not include any value-concepts, and is moreover flawed in many ways. Plato's employment of the Cyclical argument gives no justification for Stern's objection that good cannot exist without evil, if the latter has to be a contrary to the former. Plato never claims that beauty cannot exist without ugliness, or life cannot exist without death. However, his objection could be used as a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against the position that appears to be generally accepted, and according to which the ὑπεναντίον of τὸ ἀγαθόν are τὰ κακά. Were it so, the road for Stern's challenge would be wide open. Yet, it is highly improbable that Plato would commit such a grave mistake as to bring in question 'the existence of that which is good', and make it good 'only in relation to evil'. It is especially dubious that such a slip could be made in a piece of writing where Plato is obviously advocating the superiority of some higher-rate goods, as opposed to the apparent goods, accepted as valuable only by the commoners. Therefore, it is much more plausible to suppose that the error is Stern's: that which is opposed to

⁴⁵ "To god, everything is beautiful, good and just, while people take some things to be unjust, some just" (DK B102).

⁴⁶ Greene, William Chase. "Fate, Good and Evil in Pre-Socratic Philosophy" (*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 47. 1936), p. 101

⁴⁷ "[B]adness in all its varieties may prove to be definable merely in terms of deviation from the relevant good ideal – unlike a symmetrically related pair such as large-small or odd-even, each of which has its own intrinsic nature and is therefore not adequately definable in terms of its opposite's absence" (Sedley 2004, p.78, fn. 120).

the Good are not the individual evils (τὰ κακά). They are just the opposite's symptoms, a confirmation that it must exist.

3.4 *The status of ἀνάγκη at 176a6 and its relation to the ὑπεναντίον*

In the two clauses on evil, Plato uses the word 'necessity' (ἀνάγκη) twice. In its first appearance ἀνάγκη adverbially modifies the clause 'there is always some opposite to the Good',⁴⁸ and turns it into a modal proposition. This seems like a statement of *de re* modality, an assertion that the Good necessarily has the property of having an opposite.⁴⁹ It is an assertion of indispensable relation of the following kind: *the object in question* couldn't conceivably have lacked *the property in question*.⁵⁰

The question that imposes itself is whether this position is justifiable in the face of Aristotle's adamant claim in the *Categories* that there can be no opposite, or contrary, to substance,⁵¹ granted that the Good is substance or even something above substance. Besides the question whether the Good can have an opposite at all, it is *a fortiori* dubitable why it should necessarily⁵² have that opposite. To these questions only highly tentative answers can be offered. As for the first one, Plotinus attempts to deal with it by amending Aristotle's definition of contraries or opposites: "things set furthest apart from each other, while belonging to the same genus" (*Cat.* 6a17-18).⁵³ He certainly acknowledges that this definition is applicable to most of the pairs of opposites, i.e. to all those which belong to the same species or genus, like white and

⁴⁸ More precisely, it modifies the nominal predicate ὑπεναντίον εἶναι.

⁴⁹ That is to say that the modal operator does not range over the *dictum*, or the proposition as a whole, but over the *res*, or the thing the proposition is about. In other words, the claim is not that the proposition is necessarily true, but that a certain something necessarily possesses a certain property.

⁵⁰ See Plantinga, Alvin. "De Re et De Dicto" (*Nous*, 3. 3. 1969), p. 236

⁵¹ "Now it belongs also to substances that they have no opposite. For, what would be an opposite to primary substance? Just as nothing is an opposite to this man, neither to man nor animal anything is an opposite." (*Cat.* 3b24-27)

⁵² "But how can anything be an opposite to this Good? For it is not a quality. Then, what absolute necessity is there if one of the opposites exists, the other must also exist?" (*Enn.* I.8.6.21-23)

⁵³ τὰ γὰρ πλεῖστον ἀλλήλων διεστηκότα τῶν ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ γένει ἐναντία ὀρίζονται. For a more detailed account of Plotinus' position on the issue of contrariety, see O'Brien, Denis. "Plotinus on Matter and Evil". In Gerson, Lloyd P. (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press 2006), pp. 175ff

black, justice and injustice, pleasure and pain. Still, those that are to be considered opposites *par excellence* (μάλιστα ἄν εἴη ἐναντία) are definable as simply “things furthest removed from each other” (*Enn.* I.8.6.40-41),⁵⁴ without belonging to the same genus. Such are the contraries of the Good and its opposite. Plotinus’ reasoning could be something like the following: The fact that the Good exists is taken as axiomatic truth, while the presence of various good things, like reason, soul, life, virtues, etc., is rather obvious. Everything good and noble has its origin in the Good and depends on it for its subsistence. However, it is equally obvious that there are bad things as well – passions, body, death, vice, etc. They have to have their origin either in something, or in nothing. But nothing comes from nothing, so they have to originate in something. Since that entity cannot be the Good, it has to be something else. Moreover, since the Good fathers goodness and excellence, that other something, being the originator of badness and depravity, cannot have anything in common with the Good, and has to be at the furthest remove from it. So, if the origin of good things and the origin of bad things do not belong to the same genus and are furthest away from each other, then they fit Plotinus’ definition of opposites. Therefore, the Good does have an opposite.⁵⁵ The line of this argument seems straightforward and unproblematic.

The question why the Good must necessarily have an opposite is even more puzzling, since the modal operator seems to impose some kind of restrictive boundary on the Good’s absolute independence, which should not be put in doubt. At this point, it is rather difficult to decide on the question, but what seems plausible is that the necessity spoken of here refers to the relation of the worlds of Being and Becoming. In order for creation to unfold at all, it needs to be inferior to the uncreated realm, or else it would be an exact replica of the world of Being. However, that is meaningless, since the latter already exists and has been existing since eternity. And in order for creation to be inferior, it ought to owe its inferiority to something. The cause of that inferiority, without which the created cosmos simply would not be there, is not explicitly

⁵⁴ τὰ πλεῖστον ἀλλήλων ἀφεστηκότα.

⁵⁵ To illustrate his point that even ordinary substances *could* be opposites, Plotinus gives a counterfactual example: if fire and water were not adhering in a common substrate, i.e. matter, but were independently constituted of the pairs hot-dry and wet-cold, they would be opposites, in the same way as the qualities that presently occur in them are (III.8.6.49-55).

disclosed until the *Timaeus*.⁵⁶ The cosmos is a place of tension and shortcomings exactly because it is composed of contrary principles: “For mixed indeed was the origination of this cosmos, which was engendered by the bringing together of Reason and Necessity” (*Tim.* 47e5-a2). I believe that the second principle spoken of in the *Timaeus* is identical with the opposite of the Good in the *Theaetetus* Digression. This ὑπεναντίον represents the ‘lowest point’ of the world of Becoming, and thus stands in opposition to the uppermost entity in the world of Being, i.e. the Good. It is also one of the two causes of the created cosmos, and in this way a necessary opposite of the Good, granted that the creation was prompted by the intrinsic nature of the higher reality.⁵⁷ In sum, since the world of Becoming was unfolded by necessity, and had to be made inferior to the world of Being, there necessarily had to be a cause of that inferiority as well. Thus the First and the Last are opposites, and furthermore necessarily so.⁵⁸ The ὑπεναντίον of the *Theaetetus* Digression is a brute fact that cannot be circumvented. Now it is also clear why it is not possible that the evils should be destroyed – “because some things are lesser than others in comparison with the nature of good” (*Enn.* III.2.5.30), and the further they go, the lesser is their share in the good. At the bottom of the ontological ladder there is the ὑπεναντίον, which is furthest away from the ‘nature of good’. It thus represents the ultimate depravation, and since many things partially receive their nature from this entity, they cannot but appropriate its depravity and imperfection, and are therefore perceived as evil. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the physical world is overcome by evil; on the contrary, it is the most beautiful of things born (29a6), a single visible god, greatest, most excellent, most beautiful and perfect (92c5-9).

It seems that by this Plato claims that whatever is, is as it should be. Even badness, of necessity present in the world, somehow contributes to the overall beauty and perfection of the

⁵⁶ With regard to the relative chronology of the *Theaetetus* and the *Timaeus* (and the *Laws*), I follow the traditional (post-Campbellian) ordering, which places the *Theaetetus* among the (later) middle dialogues, and the *Timaeus* among the latest group (for an article-length survey of the developments in the area of stylometry and other methods of the dialogues’ relative dating, see Brandwood, Leonard. “Stylometry and Chronology”. In Kraut, Richard (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992)). Owen’s arguments in favor of earlier composition of the *Timaeus* (in Owen, Gwilym Ellis Lane. “The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato’s Dialogues”. (*The Classical Quarterly* 3. 1/2. 1953), have been successfully rebutted by Cherniss, Harold. “The Relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato’s Later Dialogues”. (*The American Journal of Philology* 78. 3. 1957).

⁵⁷ In the language of the *Timaeus*, the sole reason for the visible cosmos’ unfolding was the Demiurge’s goodness, which propelled him to organize the things in the best possible way (see 29e-30a).

⁵⁸ ἐξ ἀνάγκης δὲ εἶναι τὸ μετὰ τὸ πρῶτον, ὥστε καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον – “As necessarily must exist that which comes after the first, so must the last” (*Enn.* I.8.7.21-22).

whole. Mortality, the prime evil for most of us, is also given its proper place in the grand picture, and is not something that Plato rejects as being incompatible with the goodness of the creator and the beauty of the creation. Since the cosmos is made in the likeness of the most perfect model, the intelligible Living Being (30c-d), in order to be perfect and complete it has to contain all the orders of entities present in the paradigm (41b-c). However, these entities, being reflections of the eternal beings present in the paradigm, have to be lesser than the latter, and thereof their ephemerality. Archer-Hind writes: “The scheme of existence involves a material counterpart of the ideal world. To materiality belong becoming and perishing: accordingly αἰσθητὰ ζῶα, the copies of νοητὰ ζῶα, must, so far as material, be mortal.”⁵⁹ Even the celestial gods are not immortal *per se*, although they are granted assurance of indissolubility by their creator (41a).

As for the idea that the world is made up of opposites, it is as old as Greek philosophy. For Plato, the basic opposition is the one pointed out in the *Theaetetus*: τὸ ἀγαθόν and its ὑπεναντίον. Taylor adds that, in order to be perfect, the world has to contain all the pairs of opposites; mortality-immortality is just such a pair, moreover a very prominent one,⁶⁰ and hence the unblemished role of mortality in the cosmic drama. Therefore, the opposite of the Good is no positive Evil; it is a limiting factor, a principle of imperfection that makes the world of Becoming what it is.

3.5 ‘Mortal nature’ and the evils

The second part of the passage on evil, namely: “Nor is it possible that they [the evils] are situated among the gods, but they prowl about the mortal nature and this place as a matter of necessity,” is rather straightforward. Plato’s claim that evils do not abide among the gods does not require much comment. His theology, although at face value contains many elements of the traditional religion, is nevertheless thoroughly reformed. By the end of book II and the beginning of book III of the *Republic*, as well as in the *Laws* 899d-907b he argues for the absolute purity and goodness of the gods, while in the Demiurge’s address to the gods (*Tim.* 41b-d) their

⁵⁹ Archer-Hind, Richard D. *The Timaeus of Plato: Edited with Introduction and Notes* (London: Macmillan and Co. 1888), p. 140

⁶⁰ Taylor, Alfred E. *A Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1928), p. 253

immunity to death and injury is proclaimed. Thus, they will live forever beyond the reach of moral and physical evils.

‘The mortal nature’ spoken of here asks for more attention. In this respect the above quoted Levett-Burnyett translation again goes somewhat off the mark: Plato is not talking of ‘human nature’, but of mortal nature. Kennedy, Cornford, McDowell have ‘our mortal nature’, which could also be misleading, since we conventionally count ourselves among human beings. Chappell is close to the original, with ‘this mortal nature’, although the demonstrative pronoun is absent from the Greek text. Sedley is most accurate, with the plain ‘mortal nature’. Stern, as already mentioned, dedicates a few paragraphs to the passage on evil, and specifically comments on the phrase we are interested in in this section. He, perhaps to a certain degree justifiably, points out that the evils attached to the mortal nature represent the ungodly finitude and imperfection, of which death is the most ominous sign.⁶¹ Then he goes on to say: “All living things are mortal and thus needy. But in associating the notions of good and evil with this neediness Socrates and his interlocutors have in mind specifically *human neediness*.”⁶² He supports his last point by two textual references: 176a4, where Theodorus expresses his hope that if more people were receptive to the Socratic ideals, there would be much less evils *among humans*; 176a8-b2, where the advice to become as similar to god as possible by perfecting oneself morally is obviously applicable to human beings alone. Stern thus advances two closely connected claims, namely a) The evils Socrates is talking about stand for neediness or lack of self-sufficiency, most fully exemplified in mortality; and b) Socrates and his interlocutors are exclusively interested in human neediness. These claims call for a short comment.

First, although finitude, imperfection and suffering are by no means excluded from the extension of the term τὰ κακά, Socrates in the *Theaetetus* primarily directs the readers’ attention to some other kind of badness. Wisdom, justice and piety are among the key words in the Digression, and the divergent understanding and application of these concepts is what makes the difference between the philosopher and the *rhetor* frequenting the courts of law. Those who stick to the mundane or civic variants of the above are not able to investigate Justice itself (175c2), nor become as just as possible (176c2), and thus sink into worthlessness and unmanliness (οὐδενία τε καὶ ἀνανδρία) (176c4), being overpowered by ignorance and wickedness (ἀμαθία καὶ κακία)

⁶¹ See Stern 2002, p. 283

⁶² *Ibid.*, italics added.

(176c5). These unfortunate men and women are obviously the same persons who, turning themselves to the supremely unhappy pattern, remain confined to the place which is infested with evils (176e-177a). It seems that the evil which human beings experience is to a high degree based on moral imperfection, whose root, on the other hand, is lack of wisdom, i.e. ignorance. One of the lessons of the Digression is that by perfecting oneself morally through wisdom, one can even do away with mortality. Thus the neediness that characterizes us insofar as we are mortal, referred to by Stern as the real meaning of τὰ κακά, turns out to be a symptom of some more basic ‘force of evil’, which is, in the *Theaetetus* Digression, lack of virtue, and ultimately ignorance. This should suffice as a comment on Stern’s first claim.⁶³

As for the second, according to which the neediness in question is exclusively human neediness, the aforesaid could be used as a further confirmation of its verity. Non-human animals are incapable of both moral and intellectual lapses and improvements. This being so, I still believe that the mortal nature spoken of in the passage on evil has broader meaning. The phrase τὴν θνητὴν φύσιν, after all, simply does not mean ‘human’ or ‘our nature’. In the Platonic context it refers to the living entities lesser than the gods,⁶⁴ i.e. to the variety of winged creatures, of those who live in water, and of those who have feet and roam the planes and mountains (*Tim.* 40a1-2). These are the creatures characterized by mortal nature, and out of them, human beings are but one species. Then, Plato’s usage of the phrase τὴν θνητὴν φύσιν could mean that for him the problem of evil pertains to non-human animals as well. This would be so not only due to his acknowledgement of animal suffering, but primarily due to his acceptance of the doctrine of metempsychosis. He has already argued for the doctrine of metempsychosis – more or less directly in the *Phaedo*, indirectly in the *Meno* – and it served as a very useful background for presenting significant philosophical points. Such a function is shared by the myths in the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, the striking myth of Er in the *Republic X*, parts of Timaeus’ account of the secondary creation, etc. Therefore, there are three kinds of living entities who share the same mortal nature, because all of them experience death and badness, and all of them were, are, or will be conscious of it, once they attain to human form of life. Life of philosophy and moral improvement are, according to this picture, not restricted only to those presently embodied as

⁶³ With regard to the problem of mortality, see also pp. 28f above.

⁶⁴ Plotinus in *Enn.* I.8.6.5-10 writes that ‘mortal nature’ and ‘this place’ (ἡ θνητὴ φύσις καὶ ὅδε ὁ τόπος) mean the earth, where there is injustice and disorder, as opposed to heaven which is clean of evil.

human beings; save for the few extremely unjust and sinful souls eternally imprisoned in the Tartarus, everybody will sooner or later be given the chance to perfect their existence.⁶⁵

His analysis of τὰ κακά and τὴν θνητὴν φύσιν makes Stern draw a wrong conclusion on Plato's understanding of evil.

For humans, evils are not only needs themselves, but our awareness of these needs. Evil is a condition known as such, a condition that therefore might be otherwise. ... In sum, evil is neediness of which we are aware, and good is that which we judge might answer to this condition of neediness.⁶⁶

The assertion that Plato took neediness of which we are aware as evil, is indeed difficult to defend. On the contrary, it seems that he never considered human neediness and even mortality as true evil, but only as symptoms of bodily condition and ignorance. This, I believe, has been amply proven already in the *Apology* and *Crito* (to say nothing of the *Phaedo*), where Socrates is depicted first as taking a heroic stand in the face of the greatest danger, and next as being not at all worried by his imminent death. Over and over again Socrates repeats that not death, but injustice and ignorance are to be feared. There is no need to picture Plato as some kind of existentialist thinker, whose awareness of human insufficiencies awakens in him either horror or resignation. As for Stern's understanding of the good, it is enough to say that the attempt to define the good or goodness as in any way relative to the bad is utterly non-Platonic.

3.6 Excursus: *Phaedo 60b-c and the necessary coupling of pleasure and pain*

After these reflections on the purport of the phrase τὴν θνητὴν φύσιν, we can now dwell for a short while on the rest of the clause where it appears, i.e. on Plato's assertion that the besetment with evils of the place where mortal creatures abide is a matter of necessity (τόνδε τὸν τόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης). The opening of Socrates' instructions to his companions in the *Phaedo* (60b-c), may serve as a useful illustration of what Plato intends to convey with this statement. On the morning of Socrates' last day, after assembling near the prison and entering his cell, Phaedo and the others find him in the company of Xanthippe and their young child. Upon

⁶⁵ For a much bolder thesis, claiming that all animals are inherently intelligent and thus capable of reordering the circles of the Same and the Different, see Carpenter, Amber D. „Embodying Intelligence: Animals and Us in Plato's *Timaeus*“. In Dillon, John and Zovko, Marie-Elise (eds.). *Platonism and Forms of Intelligence* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2008), pp. 47ff.

⁶⁶ Stern 2002, p. 284

her departure from the prison, Socrates takes hold of his leg which has recently been freed from the shackle, and rubbing it, starts to ponder over the strong bond between the affections of pleasure and pain, which he extends to the point of mutual dependency, almost a conjoining brought about by necessity.

What a strange thing, my friends, said he, appears to be that which men call pleasant;⁶⁷ how wonderfully it is disposed towards what is thought to be its opposite,⁶⁸ the painful; while they are unwilling to come to the same man simultaneously, if somebody would pursue one and would seize it, he would almost always be forced to receive the other as well, as if they, although being two, have been joined by one tip of the head (60b3-c1)

Socrates next highlights his claim by making a counterfactual appeal to traditional authority in composing fables:⁶⁹ had this peculiar phenomenon caught the eye of Aesop, he would have certainly composed a fable (μῦθος),⁷⁰ to the effect that the deity, after failing to

⁶⁷ There are at least two reasons why the pleasant is qualified by the phrase ‘which men call (so)’. The first one, identified by Rowe, Christopher James. *Plato: Phaedo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993), p. 118f and Gallop, David. *Plato: Phaedo, Translated with Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975), p. 76 is that the pleasant spoken of here is no more than relief from pain. Gallop claims that, in Plato, this understanding of the pleasant could be extended to most of the pleasures human beings experience. Relief from pain, however, is not positively pleasurable, and consequently the pleasant is such only in the opinion of the ignorant, and not in real sense. The other would be that the bodily pleasures, even if granted the status of authentic experiences, are no more than illusion. In the words of the *Timaeus*, pleasure is “evil’s strongest lure” (69 d1), while in the *Republic* we read that pleasure is neither real nor pure, but deceptive (583 b3-5). Since it is also strongly dissociated from the goal of life, and thus the good (see *Phd.* 83b-e), it wouldn’t be unreasonable to say that it is pleasant only in the minds of the people in general, whom Plato is holding in no high regard.

⁶⁸ The status of pain is not brought into question. Those who claim to be in pain are holders of true belief regarding their experience (see *Rep.* 584e-a). However, it is questionable whether it is really the opposite of the so called pleasant; hence the formulation ‘what is thought to be its opposite’. That is curious. That pain and pleasure are opposites is stated in the *Republic* 583c2, and is in conformity with Aristotle’s definition of opposites. Pleasure and pain, as defined in *Tim.* 64d, are both intense disturbances, which respectively come upon and depart from the subject, and thus fit well into Aristotle’s definition. Rowe 1993, p. 119 offers a simple solution: if the pleasant is not really such, then pain is not a true opposite of it either.

⁶⁹ That the Phrygian slave, Aesop, holds some kind of authority or is somehow revered by Socrates is obvious from the episode of him versifying one of his fables, as a matter of what he takes to be a sacred duty (see *Phd.* 61a-b).

⁷⁰ Among the vast literature on Plato’s inclination to wed myth and philosophy especially instructive are Brisson, Luc. *Plato the Myth Maker* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press 1998), and Collobert, Catherine et al (eds.) [*Plato and Myth: Studies on the Use and Status of Platonic Myths* (Leiden: Brill, 2012)]. For analysis of the Aesopian myth in the *Phaedo*, see Betegh, Gabor. “Tale, Theology and Teleology in the *Phaedo*”. In Partenie, Catalin (ed.). *Plato’s Myths*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009), who also makes some useful remarks on Plato’s myth in general.

reconcile the two quarreling factions, joined their heads together, making it thus impossible for someone visited by the one not to be visited by the other as well. The purpose of this little myth is to provide some background information concerning the state of affairs antecedent to the present one, and to causally explain the arousal of the latter from the former.⁷¹ It thus serves as an allegory which illustrates the close connection between pleasure and pain, as well as the fact that even a divine power would be incapable of eliminating from this world the defective situation of being in pain.

So, the allegory presents pleasure and pain as being in a state of war (πολεμοῦντα), and the deity as desirous to resolve the dispute. How could have the good god reconciled the warring parties? In which way could have he stopped the war? What would a reconciliation brought about by a good deity mean if not subjugation and marginalization of pain? However, since that was not possible, they were juxtaposed and bound together.

Such an ordering is to be taken as the work of a benevolent god, and it is natural to ask how it reflects his goodness. Perhaps by at least allowing for some orderliness – pain and pleasure now follow a regular pattern, human beings are not constantly harassed by their incessant attacks and should be aware of what to expect and what not. Otherwise, pains are unavoidable; they are infesting mortal nature as a matter of necessity, and even a god cannot do anything about it. Through the intervention of the unidentified deity, the situation was improved, as far as that was possible, though the calamity was not altogether dispelled. Since the god of the *Phaedo* fable was unable to reconcile the dispute of the warring parties (by perhaps silencing or eliminating pain), he produced the present state of affairs, where their necessary connectedness is represented through the mythical picture of Siamese-twin animals. This could mean that at least physical suffering (which is ordinarily taken to be a bad thing) is inherent to the nature Socrates is about to depart from. The god wouldn't allow it to prevail in the dispute and thus make existence on Earth unbearable, but even he is not capable of eliminating it entirely. This is, I believe, the moral that should be drawn from the *Phaedo* fable: despite the presence of divine will and its intention to introduce sound order and harmony of beauty and goodness in the

⁷¹ Betegh (op. cit., pp. 84f) identifies four stages in the development of mythical narrative in Plato: 1) positing some initial state of affairs that calls for rectification; 2) introduction of a (benevolent) deity willing to rectify the situation; 3) application of divine power, somewhat constrained by various 'limiting conditions', to the defective situation; 4) a functional description of the current state of affairs, for which the fable is meant to provide explanation. The *Phaedo* fable fits this paradigm nicely.

cosmos, there are, as of yet unidentified, factors of inhibition of the creative process, which prevent the full realization of the divine plan.

Still, the *Phaedo* account of the relation between pleasure and pain and the fable associated with it are far from being unproblematic, especially in light of the real-life example Socrates gives. Even if we disregard the questionable status of ‘the pleasant’ and the nature of its opposition with pain briefly commented on above, their inseparability remains “a curious moral for Socrates to draw from the state of his leg”.⁷² In what way exactly is the constant conjunction of pleasure and pain to be understood?

A possible approach to the issue, as also noted by Burnet,⁷³ could be the non-extravagant assumption, first put in writing by Heraclitus: “Illness made health pleasant and good, hunger – satiety, fatigue – rest” (*DK B111*).⁷⁴ This outlook does fit well with Socrates’ example – the shackles used to cause him pain, but as soon as they were removed, pleasure ensued. Now, the state of someone’s limbs not being pressed hard by a metal device would not be normally considered as pleasurable. However, since in Socrates’ case it had been preceded by the opposite state, a painful one, it might be legitimate for him to say that he was feeling pleasure. In other words, had it not been for the antecedent pain, the state Socrates found himself could not have been described as pleasurable either. Thus it seems plausible to say that pleasure naturally ensues after pain.

The reverse situation is more difficult to explain in light of the example. Should we suppose that the state of pleasure Socrates was in should be necessarily succeeded by a painful one? It shouldn’t be so – “[t]here is no likelihood that the pleasure he now feels in his leg will be followed by pain”.⁷⁵ But couldn’t it be that the single example Socrates gives is not devised in such a way as to cover all the possible applications of the principle? He is there elucidating the alternation from pain to pleasure, and undoubtedly, he could have given an example of the

⁷² Gallop 1975, p. 77

⁷³ See his notes in Burnet, John. *Plato’s Phaedo: Edited with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1911), p. 14

⁷⁴ This ‘Heraclitean’ idea is not foreign to Plato either. He elaborates on it in *Rep.* 583 c-d, but only to dismiss the cessation of undesirable states as true pleasure. It conforms well with and straightforwardly explains Plato’s reluctance to speak of the pleasant in the passage under discussion as pleasant in the real sense.

⁷⁵ Galop 1975, *ibid.*

reverse. In fact, it is well known that pleasure can be followed immediately by pain – the delight of having a sumptuous meal is often exchanged for the pain of overeating. Even the most intense sensual enjoyment human beings experience often ends up in moroseness – *post coitum omne animal triste*. It could be objected, however, that it is not generally so – those of moderate appetite often avoid the pitfalls of dissatisfaction and pain. Still, maybe the very cessation of pleasurable sensation could be interpreted as a kind of pain. Plato actually vouches for the plausibility of this proposal: “And whenever someone ceases to rejoice in something, straightaway that quieting of pleasure will be painful to him” (*Rep.* 583e1).

3.7 Back to the *Theaetetus*: alternative view on ἀνάγκη in 176a8

There is one major shortcoming in the utilization of the *Phaedo* myth as an illustration of Plato’s point that mortal nature is beset with evils as a matter of necessity; it shifts the assumed focus of the *Theaetetus* Digression from evil as moral insufficiency to evil as physical suffering. But then again, although the predominant focus of the Digression is on the moral evil, the huge variety of inconveniences and suffering that human and non-human beings experience is by no means excluded from Plato’s account. According to the interpretation submitted in this paper, Plato first established the ontological basis for the existence of evils, which is the necessary presence of an entity or principle contrary to τὸ ἀγαθόν. Next, in the above quoted clause, he determines the precise *locus* of the evils – mortal nature and the earthly region. The evils spoken of are mainly vice and misinterpreted so-called virtues, but pain and decrepitude are also not to be overlooked. They include all injustice and suffering we undergo and perpetuate, the broad scope of varieties of badness that are associated with mortal nature, and of which there is no escape as long as one is bound to the lower spheres of existence. In the preceding clause, Plato used the word ἀνάγκη to impress upon his readers the point that it is not possible for the Good not to have an opposite (if the creation were to exist at all), and now (οὐτ’ ἐν θεοῖς αὐτὰ ἰδρῦσθαι, τὴν δὲ θνητὴν φύσιν καὶ τόνδε τὸν τόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης), his overt purpose is to convey that this mortal region, inhabited by human and non-human animals, can never conceivably be free of vice and suffering. Already in the next few sentences, Plato also provides an outline of a possible solution to the problem of evil. This is a solution, to put it

anachronistically, very much in the spirit of the Irenaean theodicies:⁷⁶ the presence of evils in our world may be seen as an impetus for purifying ourselves and leaving this mortal region once and for all. So, the evils are here to make us aware of the necessity to flee from here as soon as possible. The flight is, of course, not accomplished by spatial dislocation, but by becoming as similar to god as it is possible (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν), which is a task attainable through moral and spiritual self-perfecting. Here, as well as in the account of the two paradigms and the afterlife (176d-177a), Plato is exhorting his readers not to give in to moral weakness and be transformed from men into wolves (*Rep.* 566a4) in this life, and lead perpetual future lives as “evil men associated with evils” (κακοὶ κακοῖς συνόντες, *Tht.* 177a7). A developed human being should be able to make the right choice between good and bad, and the philosopher is there to help him or her make that choice. The presence of numerous evils, which Theodorus so bitterly regrets, serves as a reminder that the only alternative is lending one’s ear to the philosopher’s advice and working one’s way up to the realm of higher reality. Hence the usefulness and the ‘soul making’ property of the internal and external badness, which almost everyone encounters on a daily basis.

There is, however, yet another, and, indeed, a very tentative way to understand the second usage of the word ἀνάγκη, which this time appears in the phrase ἐξ ἀνάγκης. According to this understanding, Plato’s employment of the phrase ἐξ ἀνάγκης as referring to the presence of evils in the world, is actually a clear anticipation of the esoteric philosophy of the *Timaeus*, and confirmation, as well as elaboration, of the thesis that the opposite of τὸ ἀγαθόν is something else than the individual evils. The word ἀνάγκη is now used substantively – governed by the preposition *ek*, it may express origin or cause – so it means ‘of necessity’, ‘by necessity’, ‘due to necessity’, or ‘by means of necessity’. Plato’s obvious intention is to confirm once again the truism that it is unimaginable that this world could be free from vice and suffering – they are necessarily bound to the mortal nature and the material sphere. This necessity is, however, derivative from the first kind of necessity, i.e. the one that dictates the existence of the Good’s

⁷⁶ The basic tenets of Irenaean type of theodicy are that a) humans are created as imperfect, immature creatures who need to undergo moral and spiritual growth which became known as ‘soul making’ process; b) hence the original fall is not an act of sin against God, but a childhood mistake due to ignorance; c) the purpose of the world is to facilitate human beings in developing perfect moral character, and the inclusion of evil and suffering is there to draw them closer to God. For a succinct exposition of St. Irenaeus’ thought and his approach to the problem of evil, see Hick, John. *Evil and the God of Love* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan 2010), pp. 211ff.

opposite. Τὸ ἀγαθόν of the *Theaetetus*, as understood in this text, stands at the top of the ontological scale. Wherever there is a top, there is necessarily a bottom as well. At the bottom the subordinate opposite is situated, which, being an opposite, has to be producing effects contrary to those produced by the Good, or in other words, has to be responsible for the bad things. In the first part of the passage on evil it was denoted simply as ὑπεναντίον τι, but in the second Plato uses the term which will gain great significance in the *Timaeus* – ἀνάγκη. Even in the *Theaetetus* 176a8, however fancifully and even outrageously Neo-Platonic it may sound, this is, linguistically, a rather legitimate reading of the ἐξ ἀνάγκης phrase – the evils are haunting this world *due to Necessity*.

This is an understanding not unheard of among modern scholars. In his notes to Plato's *Laws* 896d, where the soul is described as αἰτία παντῶν, both of τῶν ἀγαθῶν and τῶν κακῶν, England writes: "Here is introduced the question of the origin of evil,"⁷⁷ only to dismiss the soul as the true cause of evil. He does that by calling attention to *Timaeus* 48a, where the πλανωμένη αἰτία, i.e. ἀνάγκη is, according to him, indicated as that which 'produces evil in the world of bodily existence'. He finds the same ἀνάγκη in the *Theaetetus* passage on evil, which he quotes in full, and goes on to say: "Here, as in the *Timaeus* passage, ἀνάγκη is named as the source of evil. This idea, that evil is confined to bodily existence, and our earth, is in full agreement with all that is said about evil in the *Laws*."⁷⁸ So it seems that the further 'esoteric twist' in the Digression is not utterly improbable, and there could be a strong link between the rudiments of the theory of evil in the *Theaetetus* and its more developed form in the *Timaeus*.

To sum up: my main purpose in this paper was to offer a more in-depth analysis of the passage on evil that appears, rather unexpectedly, in the not-less-striking Digression of the *Theaetetus*, obviously divergent from the general direction of the dialogue. An attempt was made to establish the following major points:

First, that although not evident at a glance, Plato's doctrine of the Forms is present in the *Theaetetus* Digression and that its presence does not cause any strain to the main argumentative flow of the dialogue.

⁷⁷ England, Edwin Bourdieu (ed., tr.). *The Laws of Plato*. (Manchester: University Press 1921), p. 474

⁷⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 475

Second, that the word ‘good’ at 176a6 refers to no less than Plato’s highest entity – αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν. The main strategy of providing rationale for this interpretation was a type of *reductio* argument: all the other candidates for taking that position were shown to be inadequate.

Third, that τὰ κακά of 176a5 are not to be identified with the opposite of τὸ ἀγαθόν mentioned in the same line. Those evils are no more than instances of badness, be they moral deficiencies (which are specifically stressed in the *Theaetetus* Digression) or physical sufferings, and thus cannot stand as the opposite of τὸ ἀγαθόν. The latter is supposed to be a unified entity and the origin of all particular cases of goodness, and thus cannot have as its opposite particular cases of badness, which stand as contraries to the instances of the Good.

Fourth, a proposal was submitted that the ὑπεναντίον of 176a6, the subordinated opposite of τὸ ἀγαθόν, and the second ἀνάγκη in the passage (176a8) could denote the same entity. In an attempt to envision the nature of the ὑπεναντίον, which, as it was argued, differs from τὰ κακά, an assumption was made that it could represent a possible early anticipation of the Timaeian ἀνάγκη, the principle of imperfection.

The *Theaetetus* passage on evil has thus been interpreted as setting the stage for a crucial doctrine which would be explicated in much greater detail in the *Timaeus*. Understood in this way, it assumes an anticipatory relation to Plato’s later thoughts on the subject, and thus proves to be of considerable interest for those inquiring into the Platonic cause of evil.⁷⁹

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⁷⁹ This interpretation does not presuppose Unitarian reading of Plato. He could have had some basic ideas at the time when the *Theaetetus* was written, which were later subjected to a much more developed treatment; or, alternatively, he could have had an already ready-made doctrine of the causes of evil alone, which does not imply that Plato’s philosophy in general was not undergoing any modifications or passing through different phases of development.

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